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LORD OF DESTRUCTION

After more than five decades, *Godzilla*, the original, darker version of Godzilla, finally arrives in North America, on DVD. Plus: On set at Toho studios, up close to the famous rubber suit, a Godzilla primer and more!
by Joseph O'Brien, Norman England, and Chad Hensley

TERROR FROM BOMBAY

Yes, Indian horror movies have dance numbers. This is their story. Plus: Hindi horror films reviewed.
by Paul Corupe

CINEMA OF PAINFUL IMPULSES

In an exclusive interview, legendary surrealist Jan Svankmajer discusses *Lucy*, his most malevolent feature to date.
by Stuart Anderson

BLOOD PUDDIN'

THE HORROR PIN-UPS OF JOE CAPOBIANCO
Feast your eyes on the most gruesome gals in modern pin-up art.
by Jovanka Vuckovic

UNLEASHED IN THE EAST:

LOVECRAFT IN JAPANESE LITERATURE
Rue Morgue investigates *The Great Old Ones* in Japanese lit.
by James Granger

NECRO-HUMOUR APOSTLE

Meet Robert S. Rhine, a jack of all trades whose horror is steeped in the blackest of humour.
by David L. Tamarin

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Post Mortem

QUESTIONS • COMMENTS • CRITICISM

YOU HIT the nail on the head regarding Takashi Miike and his *Masters of Horror* episode. I was disappointed but not surprised that Showtime pulled it. The thing that I don't understand is that his movies (like *4:00 the After*) have been aired on pay movie channels in the past. Other than that, I never thought that a show or movie could not be shown on a pay movie channel because of violence. Isn't that one of the reasons it's on Showtime in the first place? Because it could not air on a regular network? I wonder if directors for future seasons will think they have to hold back. I hope that doesn't happen.

Brian Connolly – address withheld

RE RM#59 Wow – a cover story on Miike's *Impulse*? Every issue is a winner. I think you've been the best out there because you don't focus entirely on what the big studios are putting out. You give attention to the little guy, the more obscure stuff, and you spread that info to many who might not know about it. It's not only movies, but literature, comic books, music, art, toys, games and so on. The fact that you give attention to all things horror is what keeps me reading.

Daniller – Las Vegas, Nevada

RM#58 was ridiculously lame. I respect the fact that you want to cover the fringe players of horror culture, but Jason Lapeyre's *Horrorcore* article was just plain dumb. I'm supposed to care about a bunch of rappers who sit around and talk about gore to a heavy bass riff? They aren't contributing anything at all to horror culture, they're simply organizations. And what has Adrienne Barbeau done for the lately? Seriously, was that the best sentence queen interview you could get? So she's got a memoir out. Who doesn't? And I guess we can always depend on the requisite two pages covering the editor's favourite samurai artist of the month. This issue was hardly used by the (on always) stellar reviews of new releases and reviews by your veteran staff, but seriously, this was the weakest issue since *RM#44*. You guys can do better than this.

Ryan Daley – Salt Lake City, Utah

I REALLY APPRECIATED your article on horror-themed rap music. I have been a hip-hop fan for several years, particularly the darker stuff. This is why I think *Rue Morgue* raises the bar for genre coverage: you're willing to cover all aspects of horror culture, and you give each subject the open mind it deserves. I have been stunned and impressed by how deep you guys go sometimes, considering you've covered children's horror literature, the *Book of Revelations*, horror porn, and you were even willing to review *The Passion of the Christ*. All of this and more keeps me coming back month after month. A lot of horror fans, like myself, are extremely broad-minded and love exploring in many facets of our beloved obsession as possible. For me, a love of the genre has always gone far beyond books and movies, and thank god *Rue Morgue*'s does too.

Ryan Lieske – Grand Rapids, Michigan

I WAS THRILLED this month to pick up my favourite magazine and see on the cover the words I've been waiting for for so long: Hip-Hop Horror. Not only did you review many great albums, but also included a whole section and interview with my favourite rapper/producer, the pioneer of death-rap, Necro. Thanks for another great issue. Keep it evil.

Matt Dennis – Newmarket, Ontario

I JUST READ your letter from the editor in *RM#58*. Thank you for sticking up for the reader and for the horror fan, for sticking to your guns and your morals. You have my utmost respect and gratitude and have more than earned my readership throughout your tenure. A devoted fan, even more so now.

David Torres – San Diego, California

RE YOUR EDITORIAL RM#58 While I'm sure studios try to strong-arm magazines into publicizing their films, to cover a movie on the basis of what it promises to be does not make it media outlet "dishonest" for doing so. On the occasions that *RM* does put a current film on the cover, it's always a project that's already made the rounds overseas or on the Festival circuit, like *Huff* Creek, so its creden-

tials have already been pre-sold to horror fans. Rather than encourage its readership to be open to the potential of any film, no matter what its pedigree, *Rue Morgue* more often than not sticks to material that their readers already know how to react to, and tells them nothing more than what they already feel sure about. To see a cover story on the importance of Low-craft to the horror genre, for instance, is like *Rolling Stone* breaking the news that the Beatles were really popular. So perhaps if *RM* is still around in twenty years, enough time will have passed by then that its covers in the year 2026 can safely regard our current genre scene – without fear it might cost *RM* its "integrity."

Jeff Allard – Chicago, Massachusetts

I think you missed the point. We do get to see all of those movies way ahead of time, and rather than taking money to help a company promote their latest product which we've seen and think sucks, we choose to go with something we believe in. Is that makes Rue Morgue different? – Ed

I HAVEN'T SEEN *See No Evil* yet but the review of it in *RM#58* was a little biased because the person reviewing does not like wrestling obviously. You might as well have called all wrestling fans "idiots" in the review, the way you were talking. *See No Evil* might be a shitty movie, I have no clue, but putting down everyone that watches wrestling got me a bit pissed off. Before you go off on wrestling maybe you should check the facts on why Vince McMahon is a billionaire because of wrestling.

Richard Hanel – address withheld



Dreadlines

News Highlights  Horror Happenings

Nacho Cerdà wraps first feature, *The Abandoned*

Spanish filmmaker Nacho Cerdà (the director of acclaimed short films *Aftermath* and *Genesis*) recently wrapped his first feature, *The Abandoned*, which will premiere this month at the Toronto International Film Festival. After several major script rewrites and a few casting hiccups, Cerdà found himself on set in Bulgaria for 45 days with a multi-language crew, which posed a curious problem at first.

"We were a team of four or more different nationalities so we were speaking four different languages on set all the time," Cerdà tells *Rue Magpie* from his home in Spain. "I was giving direction in English, Spanish, Spanish Catalan, and there was a Bulgarian translator on set. So it was sort of a Tower of Babel-type situation where everybody's speaking different languages and trying to communicate to a common purpose."

Co-written by Karim Hussain (*Subconscious Crush*) and Richard Stanley (*Dust Devil*), and produced by Filmbox, *The Abandoned* is a somewhat supernatural story of a movie producer named Marie (Anastasia Hille) who travels to her native Russia to claim a deed she's inherited from her biological parents, whom she's never known. Plagued by the mystery of their true identity, she's driven to uncover the truth about her family, and in doing so, learns something about herself.

"*The Abandoned* is really about identity and how we are in permanent search of who we are," he explains. "Marie wants to find out who her family was, but once she does, it's too late. She's plunged into an inferno where she'll have to fight her way out, and in doing so, she'll have to let go of the things that she's attached to. For me it's a step beyond the concept of dealing with death, and death being

the end. In this case, yes it is the end, but it's also the beginning of something else."

Like all of Cerdà's work, *The Abandoned* deals metaphorically with the concept of identity and dying. It's the next step in the evolution of his preoccupation with death, but the director is also quick to point out that it's markedly different from something like *Aftermath* (R18/147), his shocking short about a morgue attendant who does unspeakable things to a female corpse.

"I don't want the audience to expect another *Aftermath* because *The Abandoned* is not as gruesome as that film at all. Even *Aftermath* I never intended to be a gore film. I always intended it to be a very emotional trip, and in that case it had to be very graphic. In this case, there was no need to do that, even though there are a few elements that will probably shock the audience."

In the story, Marie encounters another person drawn to the Russian farmhouse for the same reasons, who turns out to be her brother. They're eventually haunted and forced to confront the issues that weigh them down. From there, Cerdà's vague about the premise, but he assures it's going to traumatize.

"I've always believed that a horror film should be intense and should make no concessions," he says. "For me, watching a horror film is like going on a roller coaster, it should be a non-stop emotional trip. [The



"I don't want the audience to expect another *Aftermath*," says Cerdà of his first feature.

Abandoned] is comparable to *Aftermath* in the sense that it is a very intense experience and very emotionally involving at the same time. I wanted to do this film as a ride, something where you can get on and it can shake you around for 90 minutes and you just come out of it like, 'Woah, what the fuck!'" he says with a laugh.

As far as what he's learned from making his first feature, Cerdà says some lessons were personal.

"I think I learned a lot about myself. The movie itself is about letting go, to be able to let go of things in your life and move on again. You lose some things but you gain others and if you can be flexible with that, you start to grow. I learned to do that myself through making this movie."

—Jovanika Vučković



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Rue Morgue president makes film debut at TIFF

Dreadlines

What started out as a "crash course" in filmmaking has resulted in an invite to this year's Toronto International Film Festival for Rue Morgue president Rodrigo Gudiño.

Shot on HD over two days in July 2006, Gudiño's cinematic debut, a fifteen-minute film called *The Eyes of Edward James*, is one of 38 shorts chosen from over 500 entries to compete in this year's Short Cuts programme at TIFF (September 7-16).

"Obviously, it's a huge honour and beyond my expectations," says Gudiño of making the cut for TIFF with his first attempt behind the camera. "They told me that the film scared them, which I guess means it hit its mark."

The short – starring Shahla Karoon-Palmer, Tal Zimerman, Richard Underhill, Robert C. Fidler, and produced by Brenton Bestz and Marco Piccini – is the first under the Rue Morgue Cinema banner. It deals with a patient who undergoes hypnotherapy and regresses into a traumatic memory, creating a dense and twist-laden narrative as the therapist and patient try to divine fact and fiction. Calling the film a "Hitchcockian heist" that's high on concept with a few gruesome stingers, Gudiño notes that he's happy with the finished product but considers *The Eyes of Edward James* mainly an experiment.

"I decided to keep my first film very straightforward," he explains. "Although many filmmakers try to reinvent the wheel their first time out, I decided to set tangible goals for myself: generate suspense and don't bore the audience."

Considering the difficulty of cracking TIFF's lineup, Gudiño and company must have done something right. And while he doesn't feel it's any harder for a horror short to make the cut over other genres, he feels that a film's ability to adhere to a certain genre's conventions certainly helps its chances.

"It's really difficult to make it into the festival, but I don't think it's especially so with genre films," he says. "But having seen a lot of short films, I would say that many direc-



tors who set out to make horror films end up with comedies in their hands, and I think there is a lot of value in trying to play a film true to its genre."

Once TIFF wraps up, Gudiño says he plans to show *The Eyes of Edward James* at festivals around the world before moving on to his next short film project, *The Demonology of Desire*.

"It'll be very different from *Edward James*," he explains. "It's a love story of sorts between two kids. It's kind of controversial and twisted, and if all goes well, I should be shooting it in October."

Among the feature-length horror films coming to TIFF 2006 is *Fido* (R34/45), a Canadian horror-comedy about a boy with a pet zombie (directed by Andrew Currie). As well, the fest's genre-oriented Midnight Madness section will host the world premieres of Jonathan King's *Black Sheep* (New Zealand) a horror-comedy about killer sheep, Jonathan Levine's *All the Boys Love Momo*, Lane (USA), about a killer targeting

Rodrigo Gudiño on the set of *The Eyes of Edward James*.

a girl on a school trip, *Trapped Ashes* (USA/Japan/Canada), a "shocking, seductive and surreal" horror anthology from Joe Dante, Ken Russell, Sean Cunningham, Monte Hellman and John Gueta, and Nacho Cerdá's *The Abandoned* (Spain).

North American premieres during Midnight Madness include Boong Joon-Ho's highly anticipated South Korean Lovecraftian monster movie *The Host*, and Christopher Smith's corporate retreat-gone-wrong film *Servitude* (UK). In addition, Kim Chapiron's *Sévière* (France), about a hedonistic weekend turning deadly, has its Canadian premiere, and, in the documentary category, JT Perry's *S&M* (USA) explores the pleasures and sadism inherent to the genre itself.

Additional TIFF information can be found at www.eiffel.ca/filmfest

Chris Boustet



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Dreadlines

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dragons-eyes.com/watch_so_budd.htm

If you've ever wondered what goes into building a full-fledged Halloween haunted attraction, this site will take you on a pictorial journey beginning with the placement of 2 x 4s for the construction of walls, and ending as the builders prepare to welcome their first scare-seeking guests. Essential for all budding haunters.

nightmarelens.com

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horrorfiction.com

Searching for a script to your favorite genre film? Chances are you'll find it at the Horror Lib, where everything from *Slaves of the Devil* to *Judith* and *remakes* to *Over the Hills in the Dark* and *M. Night Shyamalan's The Village* can be read online or downloaded as a PDF.

yep-entertainment.com

There's much to take in at this website devoted to the *Call of Cthulhu* RPG. Not only can fans download game scenarios, meet other players, read articles and watch *Lovecraft*-related videos, they can even listen to *Yog Radio*, a station that features gaming news, related chat and regular interviews with game professionals.

radiohell.com/callsofcthu.htm

Evil up-to-the-eyeballs apes, gill beasts capable of swallowing a full-grown man, tentacles that watch you, killer killers and vicious monsters that really do lurk under the bed. These are just a few of the creepy things you'll encounter while watching *Gill Stool*, a series of free black and white web-streamed shorts.



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Monsters HD searching for next generation of horror pros

"We know that the horror community is fiercely loyal to its cause," states Jason Bylan, creative director for the home-only channel VOOM Monsters HD (RMH36). "We know we have fans who'll someday grow up to make movies that will be on our channel, so we figured, hell, why wait ten years? Let's get the party started now."

On behalf of aspiring horror artists everywhere, the 24-hour digital channel has created *American Monster*, an open-ended, ongoing call for those wishing to get a leg up in their chosen field. Not a traditional contest, it's more of a silent search designed to kick-start the careers of the next generation of genre professionals.

"We don't just want Jason Vs. Boogers, we want to see new monsters and stories," Bylan cautions. "If you look at all the monster makers that inspired people, what made them great is that they did something original. Ask any one of them, they'll tell you, the secret to success is to forge your own unique vision."

American Monster is open to filmmakers, actors, makeup artists, storyboard artists, animators, illustrators, designers and graphic novel writers. Applicants can sign up on the Monsters HD website (monstershd.com/monster), where they can then upload their work or mail it to the address provided.

In order to spread the word on *American Monster*, legendary illustrator Bernie Wrightson, whose recognizable artwork has already been exposed to gree Monsters HD its comic book-influenced look, was tapped to create an animated host for the contest. In response, he came up with Uncle Samanthra, a kind of an undead Uncle Sam, or "Frankensam" as Bylan gleefully puts it.

"Our Uncle Samanthra is more than just a promo piece," says Bylan. "We see him as being an emcee, our spokesperson, the very



Monsters HD promotional artwork courtesy of Bernie Wrightson

voice of [Monsters HD]. In fact, we are in talks right now with a horror legend about fleshing him out—at least his voice—out. I'm seeing him being somewhere between the Crypt Keeper and the drill sergeant from *Full Metal Jacket*, so the estimates better be good."

Entries will be reviewed by Monsters HD, with the most noteworthy posted on the site, where horror lovers will then be able to rate them. The top submissions—as judged by the staff of the station and a few yet to be announced horror authorities—will potentially be featured in upcoming original programming.

"At the end of the day, a contest gets you, what, two nights at a hotel, a post on the back and five minutes of fame?" questions Bylan. "We want to create something bigger, and if you're good, we want people to see your work. That's why the army campaign metaphor works so well for me. We are an army, an army of fans rising up to take over the nightmares. Think of it like this: Raimi and Jackson are like generals in the field, but they all had to go through a sort of low-budget boot camp. Now it's your turn, this is your call to arms—especially the ones you keep in your backroom."

Tom Murray

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Weird Stats Morbid Facts

+ Grave-robbing was not officially deemed a crime until 1788. Before then, thieves could only be charged if they removed the shroud or any other property apart from the body from the grave.

+ The mechanical shark used in *Jaws*, known to the crew as "Bruce", shared its name with Steven Spielberg's lawyer.

+ Nineteenth-century painters would often add powder from ground-up mummies to their paints, believing that this would better preserve their artwork's vibrant colours.

+ Stuartman C.J. Graham was in his 50s when he played Jason in *Friday the 13th: Part 6 - Jason Lives*. He had previously worked as stunt double for such Hollywood superstars as Clark Gable and John Wayne.

+ In centuries past, women were known to put droplets of poisonous Belladonna in their eyes to enlarge their pupils in order to make them more attractive to men.

+ When reminiscing about the town where he grew up, John Carpenter has stated, "Everything I know about evil, I learned in Bowling Green, Kentucky."

+ After being arrested by British authorities for the violent murders of four people in September 2004, convicted killer Daniel Gonzalez told police that he had wondered what it would be like to be Freddy Krueger for a day.

+ *Phantom* series villain Angus Scrimm once played Abraham Lincoln in a stage production.

+ In 1956, Josefina Amata of Mexico, an accused witch, was burned at the stake.

+ Production designers on *Night of the Demon* used medieval woodcuts of Satan as inspiration for the demon's appearance in the film.

+ The first known English-language usage of the word "cemetery" was in 1387.

+ The high school used in TV's *Baywatch: The Experience* is the same school that was used seven years earlier for the teen soap *Beaches* (1988).

+ Ritual sacrifice was common in Aztec society during the 15th century. After the human sacrifice was secured to a stone slab, a holy man would cut open the chest and remove the victim's heart as an offering to the gods. The limbs were later served to worshippers.

The Rue Morgue SICK TOP SIX



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1. *Deranged*
Ezra's eye socket supper
2. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003)
Assaulted and salted teen
3. *Deliverance*
Recreational rectum ravaging
4. *Header*
Cranial copulation comes apace
5. *Rituals*
Riverbed bear trap trauma
6. *Cabaret*
Bartel's crucified captive



Compiled by Monica S. Kunkler and John W. Brown
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LORD OF DESTRUCTION REBORN

by JOSEPH O'BRIEN

Like the Universal horror classics and the Cold War "big bug" movies that followed, Toho's Godzilla movies were the gateway drug for many a future horror fan. Giant monster mayhem delivered through the medium of television, either as the afternoon matinee you ran home from school to catch or late-night creature features you snuck past your sleeping parents to watch with the sound turned way down. Charming as they were, those pin-and-coin releases, badly dubbed and clumsily re-edited with hastily shot footage to "Americanize" them, cemented the myth that Godzilla was poorly-produced schlock. In reality, though, Godzilla had the most serious of beginnings.

In 1954, producer Tomoyuki Tanaka imagined a monster movie on the scale of King Kong, drawing its nuclear theme from the still-fresh memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and, more immediately, from the Daigo Fukuryū-Maru (i.k.a., "Lucky Dragon") incident, in which fishermen contracted radiation poisoning after they unwittingly sailed too close to an American H-Bomb test off Bikini Atoll. This event would eventually form the basis of the original film's opening scenes.

Thus *Daikaijō Mo Tai Ninan Meru* ("The Big Monster From 20,000 Miles Beneath the Sea")—a clear reference to *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*, released the previous year) was born. Later, Tanaka suggested a new title, and with it the name of the monster, combining the Japanese words gorilla (gorilla) and kujira (whale) into something new: Gojira.

It was noted science fiction writer Shigeru Kayama who introduced the notion of the reptilian sea creature and laid out the building blocks of the story. The script was further developed by Tokuro Murata and director Ishirō Honda, with contributions from Tanaka and effects pioneer Eiji Teubaraya, who was charged with the task of bringing Gojira to life.

Budget and time constraints prevented Teubaraya—a lifelong fan of special effects pioneer Willis O'Brien (*The Lost World*), who, like Tanaka, had been inspired by King Kong—from utilizing stop-motion animation. Instead, he opted to realize the creature through a man-sized suit and miniature buildings. Following an often disastrous process of trial-and-error, Teubaraya and company created not only a monster icon, but, along with Honda, spawned an entirely new genre of film: the kaiju eiga, or Japanese giant monster movie.

Even today, viewed in its original form, *Gojira's* raw power is undiminished — a horror film in the truest sense. The striking, almost Expressionist black and white photography combined with Honda's deeply serious intent to create a metaphor for the unprecedented destruction his country had suffered, *Gojira* is both the expression of man's capacity for destruction and the result of it. It's motiveless and unstoppable, a pure engine of annihilation, uncaring and unaware of the staggering human toll it leaves in its wake.

Though viewed through the lens of fantasy, it's Honda's unflinching examination of the horror of nuclear war and its effect not just on its human victims, but humanity itself, that is the enduring soul of *Gojira*. From the image of a doctor scanning a small child with a crackling Geiger counter, to the harrowing sight of a little girl screaming over the body of her mother, killed during the creature's nightmarish Tokyo raid, to the radiation-scared body of a fisherman washing up on the shores of Odo Island, the ghosts of Hiroshima and Nagasaki haunt the film. Tragically, it was this quality that was largely excised when it was re-edited for release to American theatres.

Few people are aware that the American version of the movie they grew up with, *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!*, was, despite its many strengths, substantially altered from its original form. Fewer still could tell you that "star" Raymond Burr was anything but, his scenes shot two years later and incorporated into a story in which his character, the unfortunately named reporter Steve Martin, originally played no part.

More than anything, it's the loss of human detail that reduces *King of the Monsters!* to something more on the level of the 1950s "big-bug" machine horrors like *Them!* and *Tarantula*. With the scenes of suffering left in *Godzilla's* wake either cut down or excised entirely, *King of the Monsters!* is nearly reduced to an emotionally vacant spectacle. But even in truncated form (despite the added scenes, *KoM!* runs nearly twenty minutes shorter than *Gojira*), the sheer power of Honda's original images remains, and the film's somber message still resonates strongly, regardless of which version you see.

It wasn't until *Godzilla's* 50th Anniversary that some North American audiences were able to see the original Japanese cut of *Gojira*, when Rialto Pictures released a remastered print to select theatres. Helping to promote the release was a trio of well-respected *Godzilla* experts: Ed Godziszewski (*The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Godzilla*), Steve Ryfle (*Japan's Greatest Mon-Star*) and Keith Aiken, an artist and writer whose work on various incarnations of the monster include Dark Horse's *Godzilla* series and the *Godzilla* cartoon — probably the only fallout from the disastrous Emmerich-Devlin Hollywood *Godzilla* film that anyone actually liked.

Their work with Rialto, and a recommendation from Toho itself, led the trio to consult and create special features for the British Film Institute's DVD release of *Gojira*. Now they've been tapped to perform similar duties, not just on the historic North American DVD premiere of *Gojira* (reissued with *King of the Monsters!*), but six additional sets highlighting some of the best of the Showa-era *Godzilla* series, featuring both the original US releases and the original Japanese versions. With the DVDs coming this month from Classic Media, North American *Godzilla* fans can bring the original films into their homes for the first time.

Rue Morgue speaks with Keith Aiken to discuss the evolution of everyone's favourite atomic-age monster.

Gojira



THE TWO MIGHTIEST MONSTERS OF ALL TIME!

...IN THE MOST
COLOSSAL
CONFLICT
THE SCREEN
HAS EVER
KNOWN!

KING KONG VS. GODZILLA

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ALL NEW!

"THERE'S A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NOW GODZILLA WAS PORTRAYED IN THE FIRST FILM AS OPPOSED TO SON OF GODZILLA OR GODZILLA VS. MEGALON." KEITH AIKEN

Why do you think Godzilla remains such an enduring character after more than five decades?

I think it has to do with the fact that, for a big monster smashing buildings, he actually has so many sides to him. Different people enjoy different aspects of the character; I compare him sometimes to Batman. You have a character who started off one way, and then evolved into all

these different things. You have the cartoon, the old TV show. You watch the *Acorn* West show and it's so far removed from what Bob Kane did. But each have their fans and each are legitimate interpretations of the character. Godzilla's kind of the same way. The first film is played almost like a documentary. It's very serious, there are no winks at the camera, any of that kind of stuff. And then you get to *King Kong vs. Godzilla* and

it's basically a comedy, particularly if you watch the Japanese version. They're doing all kinds of winks at the camera and inside jokes, comparing the monsters to sumo wrestlers. And the character evolved further until you get to *Son of Godzilla* where he's now the protective parent. And then he becomes the superhero, and then they go to the force of nature. And in the more recent times they're kind of played around a bit [with the roles].

Why has he changed so much over the years?

Mainly, it's about adapting to the times. With the first film hitting so close to the end of WWII, it's very much a statement, I think. And into the 1960s the audience is younger. It started off very adult, then it's teens on dates, and by the 1970s they were directed right at kids. Their target audience is constantly changing. There was also competition from other studios and television. In Japan, TV came in the mid-1960s and just devastated their film industry. So they had to start cutting budgets and getting creative, re-using old footage, figuring out how to stretch a dollar. With *Goya* they spent the equivalent of a blockbuster budget, but by the late 1990s there was much more penny-pinching. But it's one of those things that ended up working in the character's favour because he does have different forms for different reasons.

What's your take on the differences between the two versions of the film?

I'm thinking is that the Japanese version is definitely superior, but that the American one is a product of its time, and it's really well done, especially when you compare it to other Godzilla films that were intended for US release. A lot of people say that the American version totally guts the Japanese version, but I don't believe that at all — there's still a lot of talk about the H-Bomb, and Godzilla being radioactive. But there are some great scenes in the Japanese version, like the people on the subway train reacting to Godzilla's night raid on Tokyo, and when you see it for the first time you realise that really adds something to it, that kind of person-on-the-street perspective.

[Godzilla director] Ishirō Honda really focused on the human toll, more than the monster action, in a way that never really came back into the series.

Yeah, I think the only time it's really come close has been with the 2001 film *GMN* [Godzilla: Meteor and King Ghidorah: Giant Monsters All-Out Attack] because the director, Shūsuke Kishino, really tried to go back to that kind of feel. And that one is one of my favourite Godzilla films for that very reason. There's a little more in Godzilla *Rises Again*, but other than that it really does have a more fun, lighthearted feel. Mus-

**NORMAN ENGLAND TAKES
US ON A GUIDED TOUR OF
A GODZILLA SET AND HIS
FIRST-HAND SOJOURN IN
THE FAMOUS RUBBER SUIT.**



As the summer of 1999, while living in Osaka, Japan and working as a journalist, I paid my first visit to Toho Studios—nestled in the suburbs of East Tokyo—and the set of *Godzilla*. Having grown up mesmerized by the antics of the monster and his traumatizing romps through insanely detailed miniature cities, to find myself amidst the actual rubble and smoke was an undeniable thrill. The film at production was *Godzilla 2000* and the pre-eminent giant monster series was emerging from a four-year slumber, embarking on what was soon to be termed the Millennium Series.

The following year, I put in a week of duty on *Godzilla Vs. Megagorilla*. The film featured one of the largest single sets I would ever see, the battleground where the monsters square off in front of the futuristic Fuji TV building in Odaiba. Guided by the piano-wee-like cables, the insected Megagorilla grappled savagely with *Godzilla* actor Tetsuya Kitagawa, following a near head butt from Megagorilla that almost ruined the take. I became aware of a set rhythm, one not obvious to day trippers like myself.

Driven by a need to know the mechanics of a *Godzilla* shoot, my dive into the Toho method of movie-making began in April of 2001, with Shūsuke Kaminishi's *GAIK* (*Godzilla: Mechra and King Ghidorah: Giant Monsters All-Out Attack*). Prior to shooting, I was asked by then-producer,

new Toho studio president, Shogo Tanigawa to write a continuing column detailing the production's on-set happenings for their *Godzilla* website. This was the opportunity I sought, and gladly committed the next eight months to my kaju education.

And so it began...

Studio 9 during a *Godzilla* shoot is one of the world's most daunting places—a cacophony of banging, blasting and yelling. Dust is everywhere and, following the detonation of miniatures, tadpole-shaped bits of—possibly cancer-promoting—black soot hang in the air for hours. The staff was a motley crew of skilled artisans, technicians and guys in grease-stained outfits who would've looked right at home on an oil rig. In one corner, the pyrotechnic staff was positioned amid a jungle of scopes, pressure canisters and explosive powders. Close by was the monster suit station, where *Godzilla* and other creatures stood propped in wheeled metal frames. The lighting and camera crews, the director and his assistants all had a small space of their own within the studio walls, as well. I allied myself with the art staff, where I was given desk space squeezed between two model makers—one perpetually tired-looking guy, the other a man who wailed philosophic while cannibalizing plastic model kits.

As the kaju genre had been on the go for

almost 50 years, the staff worked from a well-defined pattern. First, the camera crew places their high-speed camera in front of the empty stage. From there, the art staff sets up buildings, forests and whatever else the shot calls for to be smashed. For complex sets, such as when *Godzilla* and *Mechagodzilla* fall into the Diet Building in *Godzilla: Tokyo S.O.S.*, this can take days.

If a shot involves explosions, the pyrotechnists step up to attach mini-bombs and set fire canisters around the monster's arena. After the lighting crew sets up, the set is dressed and approved and the monster suit team takes to the stage, having already completed lengthy out-of-suit rehearsals. Depending on its complexity, a single shot takes anywhere from two to eight hours to capture, and because of the intricate effects involved, it sometimes must be done in a single take.

Days on the *Godzilla* set are long and grueling, and the toughest are those spent in front of the famous big pool. The Japanese summer is cursed with sweltering humidity, and while an explosion might send cooling water over the crew, it's chemically treated to give it a deep sea appearance.

I worked with the *Godzilla* crew for three summers, and even delivered a line of dialogue in *Tokyo S.O.S.*, but nothing beats the time I wore

**"I WORKED WITH THE
 GODZILLA CREW FOR
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 FILMING SUIT."
 NORMAN ENGLAND**



Big in Japan: (above) Hanging with King Ghidorah; and (below) climbing into the heavy Godzilla suit

an actual filming suit. It was at the end of GAK and I arranged with Toho to don one of the three rubber outfits used in the film. Although monster suits are designed around the body of a specific actor, I lucked out by being just two centimeters shorter than that year's Godzilla actor, Muzoh Yoshida. Two days after shooting wrapped, with the help of the staff, I was lowered into the massive suit. The first task was to force my feet in. It was like trying to fit into ten-year-old jeans and it took all my strength just to get past the knees. Then I worked my hands into the arms, which clasped my face to come flush against the neck of Godzilla. The crew then attached the fins to the back of the suit and with that I was sealed inside.

I was overwhelmed by the smell of latex and glue (and probably a good portion of Yoshida's built-up sweat). All was black save for the con-coidal peepholes in the neck that made for a view akin to looking out on the world through a dozen door peepholes.

Barely piercing the suit, the muffled voices of the staff warned me that they were about to unhook Godzilla from its support cage. A moment later, the weight of the suit pressed on me as if a bear had jumped on my back. With great effort, I pulled myself upright and took my first step onto the stretch in front of Studio 9. Then another. The next thing I knew, my feet were being forced apart by the staff. It turned out that in order to make Godzilla's stance look

correct, you have to walk with feet spread uncomfortably far away from each other.

For the next ten minutes, I growled in my best Godzilla roar and closed the air mercilessly, the realistic-looking claws visible through the holes in the neck. I lurched up to the big pool and back down the incline to the front of Studio 9. And all too soon my junk as Godzilla came to an end. Emerging from the suit I found I was dripping with perspiration. Later that night I passed out early from sheer exhaustion.

Eventually the outfit would return to the giant middle-aged room where Toho stored the kaiju suits when not in use (the costumes later changed location after the studio remodeled and destroyed the room). Later, during promotions for the film, it was a very odd thing to see the GAK suits on display in the HMV store in Shibuya, after the seemingly endless months watching them die and revive. As strange as it sounds, I'd actually sit in the studio sometimes at night when no one was around and talk to them. Mostly Godzilla, of course, because, well, he's the man.

Norman England is also a filmmaker; his first movie, *The 1001*, premiered at this year's *FanTasia* film festival.



sters are fighting, buildings are getting destroyed, people are getting killed but you don't really see that.

Why hasn't Toho tried a grittier, maybe gorier, version of the formula?

When King Kong Vs. Godzilla became a hit – it remains the biggest box office draw of all the Godzilla films – Toho decided to keep their kaiju films colourful, lighthearted and family-friendly. The series soon became geared towards children, which didn't lead it towards grittier stories. Even in recent years, Toho hasn't wanted to do anything that might keep away the kids, who are a large part of Godzilla's audience. There are a few exceptions, though. The first Godzilla was horrific for Japanese audiences when it was first released. Not in a gory or pritty way, but by symbolizing the fears they had in the wake of the atomic bombings in WWII and the "Lucky Dragon" scare earlier in 1954. The film received some complaints initially that it was nothing but a cheap attempt to cash in on the public's fears, but it was a hit with moviegoers and eventually caught on with film critics.

Toho also pushed their boundaries a bit with BMK, which returned Godzilla to his "spectre of war" roots and showed large numbers of civilian casualties for the first time in years. The film was a bit of a shock to some people, and it quickly became the most critically acclaimed Godzilla film in decades.

Outside of Gijira, are there other examples of more explicit or "horror" content cut from Godzilla. Also in order to get G ratings in North America?

The most extreme example is *Terror of Mechagodzilla*. In the Japanese version, there's a slow-motion Peckinpah-style shot of a character getting shot multiple times. Another character commits suicide, the lead villain whips his henchmen, there's some mild cursing, and even a bizarre topless shot, though the actress was wearing a nude upper body prosthetic. When the film was released here in 1975, nearly anything that could offend anyone was cut, which made the film nearly incomprehensible. Oddly enough, the TV version was uncut except for the fake "nude shot." The upcoming Classic Media DVD will be the first time the uncut TV version will be available on home video.

What exactly is Classic Media releasing?

First up is going to be the double-disc set featuring the original Japanese version of *Gijira* as well as the American version, *Godzilla: King of the Monsters!* Toho's struck a new 35mm print of *Gijira* which was used for this DVD. The film is over 50 years old, and I understand it wasn't stored all that well, but they've done a high-def rereastering of it, so it's basically as good as it's ever going to look. They've also done a new translation, which they sent to us for proofreading, and we corrected a few things like character names and whatnot.

Monster Madness: (top to bottom) Godzilla vs. Gigan, Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla, vintage poster art for Godzilla vs. the Swamp Monster; (left) poster for Terror of Mechagodzilla.



**CRAVING KAIJU MONSTER
MAYHEM FROM THE GENRE'S
ORIGINAL BADASS BUT DON'T
KNOW WHERE TO START?
TRY THIS CROSS-SECTION FROM
BIG G'S LONG, HARRIED HISTORY.**

GODZILLA

THROUGH THE AGES

by JOSEPH O'BRIEN

There are many reasons for Godzilla's enduring popularity, chief among them his ability to adapt to the times, reinvented and reimagined for new generations. There have been three distinct eras within the *Godzilla/Gaia* canon, loosely named, in the Japanese tradition, after the rage of their emperors.

Classic Media's new *Gaia* releases cover the highlights of the Showa Era, running from 1954 to 1975. Those films were followed by two modern revivals. The Heisei Era began with Toho's reboot, *Gaia* 1984 (released in North America a year later as *Godzilla 1985*), and continued with six sequels distinguished by recurring human and monster characters and overlapping plot lines that concluded with the death of *Godzilla* in 1995's *Godzilla vs. Destroyer*.

But you can't keep a good monster down, especially when a bad monster steals his name while he's out. After Emmelech Devlin's 1998 *Godzilla* remake proved that, while size does matter, not completely sucking also counts for a lot, Toho took their big green ball and went home to relaunch the series. Known as the Millennium Era, beginning with 1999's *Gaia reisen nureonaru* (released in the West a year later as – you guessed it – *Godzilla 2000*). Toho studio's new policy that each G-film be a stand-alone story, free of Heisei-style continuity, left directors free to recreate and redefine *Godzilla* with each new installment. For the uninitiated, Rue Morgue presents a sampling of the essentials.

SHOWA ERA 1954-1975

GAIA (1954)

The one that started it all. The physical embodiment of Japan's nuclear horror, *Godzilla* was both the dark side of man's technology and an unstoppable force of nature unto himself. Dark, serious and terrifying, *Gaia* is everything the series and the genre it spawned isn't.

Though it softens the original's visceral impact and core human drama, the recent American version (known as *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* and starring Raymond Burr as journalist Steve Martin) is not without its strengths. By tearing down *Gaia*'s structure and rebuilding it around Martin's flashback perspective, director/editor Terry O. Morse was able to generate some sus-

pense in *Godzilla*, *KoM* that's absent from *Gaia*. Unfortunately, his narrative also eclipses the love triangle between Emiko, Ogata and Serizawa that both forms *Gaia*'s emotional core and sets the stage for the monster's eventual undoing. But even in this form, the film's power remains undiminished a half-century later.

MONSTER ZERO (1965)

After battling Angilas, King Kong and Mothra in one-on-one battles, Toho decided to up the monster ante by having *Godzilla* face Mothra, Rodan and King Ghidorah all at once in 1965's *Ghidorah, The Three-Headed Monster*. Less than a year later, *Monster Zero* saw *Godzilla*, Rodan and King Ghidorah return in an all-out science fiction spectacle. This time, the monster action is in the service of an alien invasion, as the cybernetic defenders of Planet X seize control of the kaiju

power for their own nefarious purposes.

It's up to astronauts Green (Rebel Without a Cause's Nick Adams – Toho now antcipating the need for American lead actors) and Fuy (Akira Takarada, whose film debut in *Gaia* began a lifelong association with the genre that continues up to *Final Wars*) to defeat the alien plan.

Despite criticisms of its more numerous elements (such as *Godzilla*'s "jumping shoe" victory dance after his first encounter with Ghidorah, *Monster Zero* features first-rate model work and production design (particularly the Planet X scenes), and the aliens have a sleek, creepy, almost *Sexy* feel to them (David's Planet of the Werps was released the same year). And while *Godzilla* would primarily return to monster-on-monster duels, this formula had the groundwork for the alien/kaiju battle royale 1969's *Destroy All Monsters*.

It's Alive!

HEISEI ERA 1984-1995

GOZILLA VS. KING GHIDORAH (1991)

Audiences' lukewarm response to the new monster in 1989's *Godzilla vs. Biollante* left the stage for the return of a classic favorite, and the result was a monster-sized hit. Balancing disparate story elements more successfully than he had with the chaotic Biollante, writer/director Kazuaki Orai creates a complex, Terminator-influenced story that both explores Godzilla's secret origins and reinvents him for the modern age.

Humans from the future arrive in present-day Japan with a plan to travel back to WWII and prevent Godzilla from ever coming into being. Our heroes, including psychic Miki Saegusa (Megumi Odaka), whose character was introduced in *Biollante* and appears in all the subsequent Heisei Era films, agree to assist. But when they return to the present, they discover Japan terrified by an even more powerful monster, the three-headed King Ghidorah.

When humans recreate Godzilla to fight Ghidorah, the resulting nuclear explosion creates a much larger, fiercer creature—a design that persisted throughout the remainder of the series. And while late in arriving, the ensuing battles between these two titans are some of the genre's best, particularly since the apparently defeated Ghidorah transmutes into the cyberneticized form of MechaGhidorah. Godzilla himself would have to wait a few more years before encountering his own robotic clone, in 1993's *Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla*.

GOZILLA VS. DESTORUYAN (1995)

The deliriously disappointing box office of the previous year's misfire *Godzilla vs. Space Godzilla* convinced Toho that the next G-film would end with the creature's death, leading to a thrilling and surprisingly poignant exit.

When an eruption on his home of Birth Island sends Godzilla's nuclear-powered heart into overdrive, everyone scrambles to prevent a planet-destroying ultimate meltdown. At the same time, a new, rapidly evolving creature appears in Japan, one we soon learn is related to Dr. Serizawa's dreaded Oxygen Destroyer, the weapon that killed the original Godzilla back in 1954.

The plan to kill Godzilla for good seems to have re-inspired everyone involved to make this a film worthy of the event. Orai returns to the series after a three-year absence with a script loaded with callbacks to the original, most significantly the appearance of Erika Yamane (Mitsuko Kashi, in a brief but welcome cameo). Most notably, legendary composer Akira Kikube came out of retirement to create one last great kaiju



Godzilla Vs. Destoroyah

score. His Requiem, which accompanies G's final moments, is particularly haunting. It's a strong conclusion that sends Godzilla off—not with a bang—but with a final defiant roar.

MILLENNIUM ERA 1999-2005

GMC: DIANT MONSTERS ALL-OUT ATTACK (2001)

The "GMC" of the title being Godzilla, Mothra and King Ghidorah. Gamers series (the popular competing franchises from Daim Studios).

The "GMC" of the title being Godzilla, Mothra and King Ghidorah. Gamers series (the popular competing franchises from Daim Studios). The writer/director Shusuke Kaneko embraces Toho's new policy and runs with it, making Godzilla his own, far better and worse. He discards the kaiju icon's wealth of history and recasts Mothra and Ghidorah as unlikely allies. As two-thirds of a trio of "guardian monsters" (offshoots of Kaneke's Gamers movies), joined by an even more unlikely ally, the puppy-like Baragon, they emerge from the Earth to stop Godzilla's rampage. Sadly, none of them seem up to the challenge, leaving the battles feeling one-sided, largely devoid of tension.

Kaneke does, however, deserve maximum credit for restoring some of Ishiro Honda's sense of atomic honor to the proceedings, especially the chilling moment when a schoolteacher witnesses a mushroom cloud rising on the nearby horizon (the product of Godzilla's infamous radioactive breath).

Also, his experience with the lower-budgeted Gamers trilogy serves him well. Despite its comparable cost, GMC looks and feels much more expensive than the other films of the Millennium period. But the

torporous (if wordily fat-assed) G-redesign and truly inessential title are in the service of a story that's slight even by kaiju standards, and sadly, both the human characters and the monsters have a lot less personality than usual.

GOZILLA: FINAL WARS (2004)

Toho took advantage of Godzilla's 50th anniversary to announce G's retirement and send him out in high style with an explosive remake of *Destroy All Monsters*, courtesy of Versus writer/director Ryuhei Kitamura, who goes further over the top before breakfast than most directors do in an anime career.

Final Wars throws in everything, including the kitchen sink, in the form of flying super-sub Atargon (from Ishiro Honda's 1963 adventure of the same name), re-imagined as an anti-Godzilla weapon that actually works. It buries him beneath a mountain of ice before Kyle (Seiji) Cooper's ADD-friendly title even rolls! The film throws in heroic mutants, malevolent aliens updated from *Monster Zero* (sporting the same funky eyewear) and nearly every kaiju monster in creation (up to and including the hated baby 'zilla Nijiga).

Kitamura plays to his own core audience rather than Godzilla's, and the result is a mess, though never boring, bog. Who needs plot where there's a new monster battle? Matrix-styled metaphysical martial arts duel or crazy motorcycle chase every ten minutes or so? Even Kane Kuregi, son of nipa movie legend Sho Kuregi, shows up as part of the latest incarnation of the Counter-G Team. *Final Wars* focuses purely on delivering the giant monster goods, up to and including the long-awaited showdown between Godzilla and his Emmerich-Devlin American wannabe. Guess who wins. 



COLLECTABLE CREATURES

Just as Godzilla has left his mark on Tokyo, Godzilla toys have made a huge splash among collectors, most of them courtesy of Japanese companies known for ingenuity and craftsmanship.

That said, the very first Godzilla toy, released in 1966 by Marusan, was a humble 9" vinyl figure with limited articulation and little resemblance to the actual film character. Nevertheless, it was a success, and if you can find one today it can be worth thousands of dollars (depending on condition, colour and paint schemes).

While Marusan Godzilla vinyls may be among the most expensive of Godzilla toys, the most popular come from the Bulmark company. In the '70s, it released a series of figures – some painted in psychedelic colours, others able to shoot sparks – ranging from 3" to 14" tall, including the then-Cadillac of monster toys: a 12" Mechagodzilla that fires missiles from both its hands and chest. Expect to pay over \$2000 for one of these mint-condition monsters.

In 1976, toy company Popo took it to the next level with the Talking Jumbosaurus, a bulky, plastic Godzilla over 16" tall, with wheeled feet and a night light that shoots out like a missile with the press of a button. Even cooler is the pull-string, hidden between two fins on Godzilla's back, which causes the lizard king to roar loudly when pulled.

They just kept getting bigger and more complex. When Mattel eventually licensed Popo stuff for North America, it released a whopping 24 Godzilla, complete with wheels, projectile fist and a retractable frame-like tongue controlled by a lever on the creature's back. It was part of the venerable World's Greatest Monsters series, which also boasted a Rodan with a 36" wingspan.

More recently, Godzilla toys have been geared towards the adult collector through retro-style items such as glow-in-the-dark vinyls, a metal wind-up of Godzilla riding a tri-cycle, and even a figure of the monster that opens up to reveal another figure inside of it – the man working the suit.

The franchise might wax and wane, but Godzilla toys remain wildly popular: shaping the world of monster toys – one projectile fist at a time.

For a definitive history of Godzilla toys, please see issue #7 of Super? Magazine or check out their online store at super?store.com.

Chad Hershey



Godzilla: Final Wars: King Kong the giant spider attacks!

What about DVD extras?

For these DVDs we're doing audio commentaries, creating new featurettes on the films and the people who made them. The commentary by Ed and Steve covers the making of the films, on both *Gaia* and *King of the Monsters!*. KoM! also has commentary from Terry Morse Jr., whose father was responsible for re-editing *Gaia* and directing the new scenes with Raymond Burr. They've also written a sixteen-page booklet on the making-of, and produced two featurettes – one covering the creation of *Gaia*'s story, and another on the creation of the first monster suit. Ed has the most extensive collection of stills from the *Godzilla* films of anyone I know, and he's including as much of that as possible. But everything has to be approved by Toho.

And Toho's been cooperative with you?

Yeah. They have a policy of not directly helping fan activities, but at the same time because I've done professional work on Godzilla, and because I've gotten to know them on a personal level, they're a little more open to talking about things, answering questions. They're not in the habit of sending large quantities of photos or anything like that, but they've never complained about anything I've done.

You mentioned that King Kong Vs. Godzilla was a huge hit. Why didn't King Kong have the staying power in North America that Godzilla does in Japan?

I think Godzilla is more adaptable and lends himself to a wider variety of stories. The character evolved to fit the times... there's a world of difference between how Godzilla was portrayed in the first film as opposed to *Son of Godzilla* or *Godzilla Vs. Megalon*. King is a great story, but whenever filmmakers stray away from the apocalyptic/Empire State Building tale, what makes the character special gets lost and you end up with something as laughable as *King Kong Lives*.

Final Wars, from 2004, was announced as the final Godzilla film, which is highly unlikely. Where does the future of Godzilla lay in terms of another cycle?

It's honestly too early to say. Toho produced a *kaika* film every year from 1961 to 2004, and I think audiences have simply burned out on the subject for the time being. The box office failure of the 50th anniversary film *Godzilla: Final Wars* convinced Toho to take a long break from the series – something they had been considering for a while – and let demand build again. I imagine where the next wave of films go will depend on when they decide to re-launch the series and what audiences are asking for at that time. My hope is that Toho will try to be less formulaic with the next cycle. The stories and special effects often suffered because the movies were being made every year; a little more time for production could result in much better films. I also think that by trying to appeal to everyone the movies sometimes don't grab anyone... if the studio focuses less on market research and more on crafting the best movie possible, Godzilla will find the audience needed to keep the character alive for years to come. ☺



*All Lilith ever wanted...
belonged to someone else*

"Tony Marsiglia has
crafted a truly twisted
and disturbing tale of
envy's corrosive power"

Merle Bertrand
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SINFUL

written and directed by TONY MARSIGLIA

on DVD October 3, 2006



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JUST PRIOR TO THE RELEASE OF HIS HOLLYWOOD HORROR COLLECTION VOL. 1, MONDO MACABRO TOPPER AND GLOBAL GENRE FILM EXPERT PETE TUMBS TAKES AUE AMONGUE THROUGH THE BRIEF HISTORY OF HINDI HORROR MOVIES... WITH DANCE NUMBERS!

TERROR FROM BOMBAY

BY PAUL CORIPE



Series of torture, death and disembodiment are standard to horror fans, but the prospect of watching a slasher movie with song and dance numbers can be truly frightening. In Bollywood, though, it's not uncommon for heroes to cap off an evening of vampire hunting by taking the stage at some pastebord Bombay discotheque, happily lip-synching as they swing their hips to a sweet tabla beat.

Though the fertile Indian film industry easily outpaces Hollywood, cranking out an astounding 900 movies a year, scenes like the one described above are relatively scarce. In brief periods of musicality, Hindi horror movies continue to take a backseat to dramas, comedies and action films, but they are slowly changing.

Pete Tumbs, author and co-editor of *Mondo Macabro DVD Special*, blames the "lack of a horror tradition" for the slow growth of the genre. "There, it's all about the musical numbers,"

an Edgar Allan Poe, M.R. James and these kinds of writers, so [Bollywood filmmakers] have had to import a Hollywood model and Indianize it."

This clash between Western horror motifs and Eastern storytelling is obvious in *Mondo Macabro's* latest DVD release *The Bollywood Horror Collection Vol. 1*. The two films on the set, *Purana Mandir* (1984) and *Bandh Dhanuza*

(1990), owe much of their pedigree to European and American horror cinema, but they've been reinterpreted through local legends and mythology to please Bollywood filmgoers (see sidebar for reviews). Bookending a short-lived breakthrough known as the "Doom Boom" that saw Bombay cinemas flooded with cheap horror movies, these are two key films from India's most influential horror directors, the Ramsey Brothers, who dominated the period for 1950s fraught castles, and yes, musical numbers.

and tangentially related subplots into a three-hour spectacle may be baffling to some North American audiences, but India's commercial film industry is firmly entrenched in a cinematic style known as "masala", a Hindi term that refers to a mixture of spices, and horror is no exception. Not only are Indian horror films usually bursting with extravagant song and dance routines, they also frequently drift beyond the established borders of the genre into comedy, romance, martial arts and melodrama in an attempt to appeal to the broadest audience possible. It's simply expected by Indian audiences, a Bollywood horror film without musical numbers would be like an Italian zombie flick without gut-munching – unthinkable.

"Sometimes horror film audiences are shocked by the music and comedy the first time they see a Bollywood horror film," explains Tumbs. "But you've got to go beyond that and see that these films come from the heart, they're made by people who genuinely wanted to make good horror movies."

Though a handful of *Did Dark House* suspense films had been made in India as far back as the early 1930s, it was the Ramseys who proved to skeptical producers that all-out horror could be a windfall at the Bollywood box office when they rose to prominence in the 1970s. Their dynasty began when family patriarch F.U. Ramsey enlisted his son Kumar to write scripts based on some of the popular imported horror films, while bro-



dominated the period for 1950s fraught castles, and yes, musical numbers.



his Tula and Shyam would direct. Together, they made 1972's *Zameen Aur Aashee* (Two Vards Under the Ground, and all but dominated the genre for over two decades, cranking out more than 50 horror films before the early 1990s. Tombs believes the Ramsays were the most important Indian horror filmmakers of their time.

"The good Ramsay Brothers' films are really well done within the context of what we would call B-movies," he explains. "They had fantastic set design and production design and set pieces, and they used to pull these things out [film after film, which most of the other producers didn't have access to. Though their films were usually relegated to the B-movie ghetto because they lacked the budget and all-important star power that many Indian films are judged by], the Ramsays packed their films with enough sex and thrills to develop a core cult audience, especially after their hit *Purana Mandir*." [It] was the Ramsays' most successful production ever, a big breakthrough film," he continues. "Everybody from their mid-20s onwards knows the Ramsay Brothers and what that film is, even if they haven't seen it. It's like *The Evil Dead* – it was a phenomenon."

Purana Mandir (The Old Temple) carved out the formula for the industry, with young heroes venturing out to the countryside to encounter a spooky house, ancient curses and as much implied sex as the censors would allow. But what really drove the film's earnings was Saamir, an oatmeal-faced ghoul with wispy long hair and fangs who became one of Bollywood's immortal movie monsters. Played menacingly by Anirudh Agarwal, Saamir was so popular that he garnered his own sequel (a rarity in the industry), the 3-D shot *Saamir* (1985).

Agarwal "was something else in the film. He's just amazing," says Tombs. "There were others trying to curate a kind of Indian Boris Karloff persona for themselves, but none of them worked. Agarwal was very tall, and he had this very sweet face. With the right makeup and the right



Hindi Horror Wyndham (above) But terror, Bollywood style in *Bandh Darwaza* (opposite) demonic possession in *Veerana*

lighting, he looked very macabre."

What's most surprising about *Purana Mandir* is how strongly it's rooted in the Gothic tradition Tombs explains, "In the early days of Indian cinema, all the production design, the camerawork, the lighting, the cinematography was basically taught by Germans and Italians."

Based on this exposure to the European Gothic style, Bollywood directors became adept at creating lush settings on a shoestring, and as a result, the Ramsay Brothers share an affinity with

cut, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Halloween* – all of which were readily available as imported VHS tapes – and added it homegrown dance routines and a pinch of local religious mythology. But along with these films' subtle innuendoes of eroticism, what really kept theatres packed were plots driven by sexual morality and generational politics that spoke to young Indian audiences.

"They were aimed at college kids, and gave them exactly what they wanted to see: boys and girls going off without their parents' knowledge,

"EAST ASIAN BEAUTY DOESN'T HAVE AN EDEGAR ALLAN POE OR H.P. JAMES, SO BOLLYWOOD FILMMAKERS HAVE HAD TO IMPORT A HOLLYWOOD MODEL AND IMITATE IT." PETER TOMBS

the atmospheric style of Mario Bava and Terence Fisher.

"*Purana Mandir* was the first film where the Ramsays pulled out all the stops. They really kept alive this Gothic tradition that had kind of vanished in the 1970s and '80s," says Tombs.

Purana Mandir's impressive box office and easily copied formula also kicked off the five-year Doom Boom, as rival production houses saw the opportunity to make big profits from small budgets. To keep up with the sudden demand for creature features, local studios often pilfered ideas from Hollywood. The *Bor-*

driving off into the country to combat evil," Tombs explains. "They're showing the old gasp factor that you don't have to be down and accept the past, that you can fight back."

Tombs acknowledges, however, that this period was dominated by producers who preferred the sight of rapes to blood.

"Most of the films that came after *Purana Mandir* were made by opportunistic producers that didn't really have a feeling or an understanding for horror. They thought, 'you go body in a rubber mask, chasing a girl down a beach, and added some gore to make it look

MONDO MACABRO UNLEASHES ITS FIRST
DOUBLE-SHOT OF CLASSIC INDIAN HORROR FILMS,
BUT ARE THE MONSTERS AS SCARY AS
THE MUSICAL NUMBERS?

MASALA MACABRO

BY PAUL CORUPE

These jet-setting B-movie sinuses at Mondo Macabro have so far served up a wide array of bizarre cinematic treats from the far-flung reaches of Indonesia, Turkey, and Mexico. Now they're set to crumble even more cultural barriers with *The Bollywood Horror Collection, Volume 1*—an essential initiation into the unique musical world of Hindi horror.

The double-feature-disc kicks off with *Bansh Derasar* (The Closed Door), Shyam and Tulsi Ramsay's creepy 1990 vampire tale that manages to stay more or less focused on the main horror plot, making it an ideal introduction for Western audiences not familiar with Bollywood's cross-genre approach. Filtering from Stoker's influential novel through Eastern sensibilities, the film features Kamra, a young girl, who heads to Black Mountain to make a pact with the evil vampire Neela (Anirudh Agarwal) to win the object of her affection, Kumar, away from his current girlfriend, Sapna. In return for Kumar's undying love, Kamra is forced to become Neela's unholy servant, tracking down fresh bodies for his rituals. In order to break the hold over her boyfriend, Sapna and Kumar must stop Kamra and put the vampire in his grave—for good.

By contrast, the Ramsay Brothers' 1964 success *Purana Mandir* (The Old Temple) feels like a patchwork quilt, with left-field comedy bits and jarring musical numbers. This time, a 200-year-old family curse stands in the way of Suman and her boyfriend Sanjay's plan to tie the knot. It's all because her ancestors beheld killer cannibal and degenerate Saamri (Agarwal), who vowed revenge against their bloodline. Afraid that his daughter will turn into a demon

after giving birth, as her mother before her did, dear old dad forbids the marriage, prompting the star-crossed pair to head to the old abandoned temple to do battle with Saamri's resurrected corpse.

Despite its box office success in India, *Purana Mandir* is less satisfying than *Bansh Derasar*, at least partially because a major subplot is a parody of an old Bollywood blockbuster, which few Western audiences will have seen. The 1940s elements don't work quite as well either, as *Bansh Derasar*, Agarwal's vampire Neela enforces the suave charms of Lugosi and Leo to embody menace every time he's on screen, casting an impressively sinister shadow over the entire affair. His portrayal of Saamri just isn't as confidently creepy, though he is used effectively in the industrial Old Dark House setting, thanks in part to the Ramsays' expressive camerawork.

Though each of these films borrow elements from the North American slasher boom—*Bansh Derasar* even features a variation on Harry Manfredini's slithering Friday the 13th theme song—they seem to owe their structure and style more to Universal's pre-war creature features and the even earlier German Expressionist classics. A few limbs are sacrificed to please gas fans, but most of the horror comes from misty sets, saturated colours and evocative shots of the masked Agarwal snarling and styling his female victims. Both films even and in true Frankenstein fashion, as a throng of torch-bearing villagers appear to rid their rural township of the evil monster.

There's no denying that the long running times and musical numbers may challenge a Western audience, but genre fans will find plenty to



write about these gaudy-looking Bollywood horror films, especially the accomplished *Bansh Derasar*, a unique take on the vampire story that recasts the Western religious elements with their Hindi counterparts.

Of course, what really makes Mondo Macabro's DVDs vital resources for world horror fans are the fascinating documentaries, and *The Bollywood Horror Collection, Volume 1* is no exception, offering a pair of worthwhile contextual documentaries—one on Saamri and the Ramsay Brothers, and another on genre films from Bollywood and nearby Pakistan's "Lollywood" cinema, making this the perfect primer for South Asian horror neophytes. **A**

bers and some suggestion of sex, then that was enough.

Still, some producer-directors, such as Vinod Tewari and Mohan Shukla, managed to make their mark. Shukla turned out one of the better *Paranormal* Mandir rip-offs, *Khooon! Mahal* (1987), while his film *Kabristan* (1988) featured a mad, grave-digging doctor. Likewise, Talwar gained notoriety for his *Fright Night*-influenced *Moh* (*Waryaat Raat*) (1989) and the later creature feature *Khooon! Panch* (1991), both relatively inexpensive productions which boasted memorable monsters.

"Shukla and Talwar had a feel for how to structure those movies and they'd seen a lot of Western films, so they know which elements would work and which ones wouldn't," says Tombs, who counts *Khooon! Mahal* among his favourite Bollywood horror flicks.

The other film featured on Mondo Macabro's DVD, *Banish Darwaza* (*The Closed Door*), appeared just as the boom was dying down, but still ranks as one of the Ramsay Brothers' most accomplished efforts.

Like *Parana Mandir*, the film has Gothic settings, but you can see the brothers pooling together everything they had learned about cinematography, lighting and production design into a genuinely spooky experience, including a shower head that dops blood, a cursed woman transforming into a ghoul after gaining birth and a clover leafle, in which the hero hides a crucifix, the Qilin, and Hinduism's Om symbol made the vampire's collection of coffins to prevent him from cheating death again.

"Brenda Derwaza is probably their best movie in terms of acceptability to Western audiences,"



It's a Wonderful Horror in *Parana Mandir*

notes Tombs: "It's kind of a vampire story, and it doesn't have the long comedy and musical sequences that most of their movies have—it's a lot tighter."

Not that it mattered. Due to the over-saturation of the cinemas with cheap horror product, the Doom Boom fizzled out as quickly as it started, with audiences tiring of the formula the Ramsays themselves had popularized a few years earlier. Following the box office failure of their film *Mahakal* in 1993, the Ramsays retreated to the small screen to concentrate on *Zee Horror Show*, a serialized TV program.

Recently, horror has made a comeback in India with a renewed bid for mainstream success. A filmmaker named Ram Gopal Varma, who made a movie called *Raatim* 1992 (an "interesting" entry according to Tombs), tested the waters again in 2003 with a genre entry called *Bhoot* (*Ghost*), which became a hit and helped restart the horror industry. Setting up his own production company, Varma built his reputation quickly, releasing a dozen or so horror movies in the last few years, including *Dema Maro Mer* (2003), a well-received anthology film that harkens back to the days of *Amicus*.

"I've always thought that [Varma] was the guy who was going to make the great Indian horror movie," admits Tombs. *Bhoot* was even influential enough to convince the Ramsay brothers to return to the fray in the wake of *Vigraha*'s success. Shyam Ramsay took the solo directorial

debut with the uneven *Dhond: The Rag* (2003), which trades rubber-faced monsters for psychological horror (and a few *Evil Dead*-inspired ghouls). More recently, another Ramsay sibling Deepak, directed *Aasma* (2006), a calculated throwback to the family's golden age in the 1980s. Though he admires the idea, Tombs worries that audiences now used to MTV camera angles and rapid-fire editing may be uninterested in the Ramsays' vintage style.

"They want to see Indian movies as fast-moving and as modern as the Western movies," he says. "If you look at the new generation of Indian horror movies, they're slick and very sophisticated."

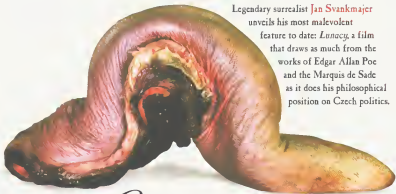
Monsters and music may seem like an unlikely mix for Western viewers, but Tombs hopes to turn Mondo Macabro's Hindi horror double feature into an ongoing DVD series.

"Let me put it this way, if this one works, we do more," he laughs. "The biggest problem in getting the materials, I'm really hoping that we can do *Weraas*, another Ramsay Brothers film that I think Western audiences can get into. There's another film called *Red Rose* from 1980, which is like an Indian giallo and is really good. There are still a lot of interesting movies out there."

Despite his affinity for the Ramsays' mid-'80s films, Tombs holds out hope that India's horror has yet to fully mature.

"I feel like something's going to happen with horror movies in India. There's a lot of people there who are big fans and they get all the stuff shipped over, and there's loads of young guys there making their own digital video movies that's gotta have an influence."





Legendary surrealist **Jan Svankmajer** unveils his most malevolent feature to date: *Lunacy*, a film that draws as much from the works of Edgar Allan Poe and the Marquis de Sade as it does his philosophical position on Czech politics.

Cinema of PAINFUL IMPULSES

BY STUART ANDREWS



"Ladies and gentlemen: What you're about to see is a horror film with all the degeneracy peculiar to that genre," warns director Jan Svankmajer, appearing on camera in the introduction to his latest film, *Lunacy* (a.k.a. *Sileni*). "It is not a work of art," he continues. "Today, art is all but dead anyway. In its place, is a kind of trailer for the reflection of Narcissus." And so begins the film, quite possibly Svankmajer's most revealing feature to date.

The notorious Czech surrealist filmmaker began his career in the mid '60s and for the next 25 years has gone on to create a collection of brilliantly constructed short films that firmly established him as one of the world's greatest stop-motion animators. He made his feature debut in 1983 with *Alice*, a truly unsettling and horrifying adaptation of the Lewis Carroll children's classic. Following his second feature, *Faust* (1994), Svankmajer abandoned the short film form to focus his energies entirely on features. A study of his work reveals an artist fully dedicated to the continued exploration of his personal aesthetic and philosophical obsessions, and one who constantly pushes the boundaries and limitations of his craft. With *Lunacy*, which Svankmajer describes as a "philosophical horror film", we find the artist at his darkest and most cynical.

Set in a bizarrely anachronistic 19th-century France, *Lunacy* concerns the misadventures of a young man named Jean Berlet (Pavel Liska) who, tormented by recurring nightmares of getting dragged away to the nuthouse, befriends an eccentric Marquis who convinces him to voluntarily check into the nearby loony bin in order to confront his fears head-on. It doesn't take long for Berlet to discover that the inmates are running the asylum, led by the Marquis himself, while the true directors of the asylum have been tarred, feathered and imprisoned in the cellars below. Jean eventually conspires with a tormented young maiden to release the guards,



Moat Puppet Theatre: One of approximately 30 animated segments in Svankmajer's *Lunacy*. Opposite: Jaroslav Dusek as Dr. Murlopec, and (below) Jan Triska as the Marquis de Sade

but in doing so he unwittingly unleashes a ferociously repressive force. The wanton freedoms enjoyed under the Marquis' reign are abruptly abolished, replaced instead by the cruel and unusual punishments doled out with morose glee by the asylum's proper caretakers.

"The main plot is an argument over how to manage a lunatic asylum," Svankmajer tells *Rue Morgue*. "If we substitute the lunatic asylum with our present world, we discover the theme of the film. I also think it's a rather nice commentary on religious fundamentalism which is currently destroying the vestiges of our civilization."

From a stylistic perspective, *Lunacy* is perhaps Svankmajer's most conventional film. His early features combine elaborately staged stop-motion animated sequences with live-action scenes that feature little or no dialogue. But with each successive feature, he has moved progressively towards an increase in live action and dialogue, with the stop-motion sequences featured less prominently. By Svankmajer's standards, *Lunacy* relies on an unusual abundance of dialogue with the animation largely relegated to a series of interstitial segues between the scenes.

"Now that the film is finished, it does not seem to me that it contains less animation than the previous films," argues Svankmajer. "But that's not important. There are approximately 30 animated sequences in *Lunacy* that have no direct connection with the action in the film. They are analogical 'commentaries' to the action and theme of the film."

The sequences in question are executed in classic Svankmajer style, featuring stop-motion severed tongues and disembodied eyeballs, hiccuping about and getting up to all sorts of mischief. Slabs of freshly sliced meat squawks through mortar and bricks and burst through paintings, statues and various other traditional symbols of the established order.

In terms of where he drew inspiration for such deranged imagery, Svankmajer admits a great debt to the writings of the Marquis de Sade, whose philosophy of personal liberty and freedom unfettered by conventional morals has

been an enduring obsession of the filmmaker and surfaces repeatedly throughout his body of work (most notably in the 1996 feature *Conspirators of Pleasure*). *Lunacy* also borrows greatly from the stories of Edgar Allan Poe (specifically, *The Premature Burial* and *The System Of Dr. Tarr And Prof. Fether*), continuing

Svankmajer's career-long fascination with the writer's work. (His 1983 short, *The Pit, the Pendulum* and *Hope* is arguably one of the greatest Poe adaptations ever put to film.)

"I first encountered horror in the works of Edgar Allan Poe," explains Svankmajer. "It was at the beginning of my puberty, a decisive encounter" for my adolescence in a similar way as

Lawrence Carroll's *Alice* was crucial for my childhood. I cannot put them aside, they are forever part of me. Then came other encounters: Dostoevsky, Kafka, German Romanticism, surrealists and, especially, the Marquis de Sade. I consider his Philosophy in



Son of SVANKMAJER

THE TORCHBEARER

Written and directed by Věclav Svankmajer
Boravut Films

For Věclav Svankmajer, it must have required a certain measure of intestinal fortitude to embark upon a career as a surrealist stop-motion animator given that his father is arguably the greatest surrealist stop-motion animator the world has ever seen. And while comparisons to his father's work are unavoidable and the influence is clearly apparent, with his latest film, the modestly executed and defiantly individualistic 25-minute short *The Torchbearer* (Swedend), Věclav has firmly established himself as a formidable talent in his own right.

The son of Czech filmmaker Jan Svankmajer and his wife, long-time artistic collaborator Eva Svankmajerová (who unfortunately passed away shortly after the completion of their latest feature, *Lunacy*), Věclav, like his parents before him, is an artist of many talents: an accomplished painter, sculptor, filmmaker and graphic designer.

With *The Torchbearer*, he brings to the animated film all of the sophistication and striking personality abundantly apparent in his other work. Told in purely visual terms and without a thread of dialogue, it relates the quest of a brave gladiator who, in order to rebuke the earth's perpetual cycle of day and night, must ascend the throne of a mystical moon-drenched city. Along the way, he's faced with a host of infernal trials and is besieged by all manner of unearthly creatures, including a pack of ravenous rodents and a mechanical winged demon.

Sharing his father's bary-tonal sensibility and sparkling with a truly magnificent visual style, *The Torchbearer* goes a long way to dispel the age-old adage that talent skips a generation. For more information on the director and to view samples of his artwork, visit his website: surrealismus.cz/svankmajer.

Stuart Andrews



A tortured patient (Anna Geislerová) in Svankmajer's deranged political satire, *Lunacy*

the Boulder one of the most subversive books ever written."

Svankmajer is widely noted for such intense political satires as 1962's *Dimensions of Dialogue* and 1969's *The Death of Stalinism in Bohemia*, but *Lunacy* is an uncharacteristically mean-spirited endeavour, even by the surrealist's typically cynical standards. As angry and intense as some of his previous films are, there's generally a good-natured spirit about them, a certain joyful perversity pervading the work that's somewhat reminiscent of a Terry Gilliam/Wertzy Python style of absurdity. And while these elements are undoubtedly still present in *Lunacy*, there's a cruel and unsettling undercurrent that permeates every frame of the film. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that for Svankmajer, *Lunacy* brings into an unprecedented clear focus, a range of concerns that have plagued the animator's films for decades.

"The central motif of my films (especially the longer features) is manipulation and, of course, its opposite, freedom," explains Svankmajer. "It's in fact still the only theme for which I am willing to take a brush, pen or camera into my hands. It's a 'dark' theme because people do not embrace its urgent nature. Repression and manipulation has reached such a degree in our civilization that people no longer perceive it as repression and manipulation – they even voluntarily participate in it. Under such circumstances, it's necessary to recur to the darkest (and most drastic) elements."

His ongoing obsession with these themes becomes understandable when one takes into account that, for the majority of his career, he

was forced to work under what he considered to be a repressive state power and for the most part, had to cleverly disguise his subversive intentions. But with the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia in 1989, the animator's difficulties were far from over.

"I obviously no longer have problems with the kind of primitive censorship practiced by a totalitarian regime," he explains. "The current repression and manipulation works in more inconspicuous ways, in line gloves there is simply so much money for certain projects. We spent five years looking for money to shoot *Lunacy*."

This perhaps explains the intensity of *Lunacy*'s political satire, that even with the dismantling of a totalitarian regime, the forces of repression are still ever-present. The quintessential example of Svankmajer's philosophical position can best be observed in the film's final image: a hunk of meat suffocating in a plastic package on a supermarket shelf. Despite being so thoroughly stifled, the meat continues to pulse and breathe beneath its restrictive packaging, the grotesque nature of the image suggesting a bittersweet glimmer of hope, revealing that, at its core, *Lunacy* is a surrealist celebration of the inexpressible nature of the flesh.

"Surrealism is a spiritual path which aims to change the world and transform life," explains Svankmajer. "I admit this sounds, especially nowadays, very utopian, but it has been utopias that have moved humanity forward in terms of ideas."

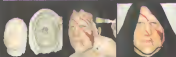
Lunacy recently began a limited theatrical run, courtesy of Zeitgeist Films. For screening times, locations and more information, visit zeitgeistfilms.com.



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BLOOD PUDDIN'

★ The Horror Pin-ups of Joe Capobianco ★
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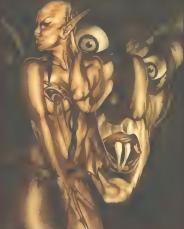
Et at your long-dead heart out, Brity Grable. At first it seems like an odd marriage: monsters and sexy ladies. But artist Joe Capobianco manages to capture the buxom beauty of strippers with scars, girls with gills and other rear-enders with his dirty brand of horror pin-ups.

Over the years, the pin-up tradition has become synonymous with the term "cheesecake": art or photographs of scantily clad women in provocative poses. Capobianco refers to his airbrushed ladies as Blood Puddin', a luridish alternative to conventional cheesecake (bringing together classic pin-up sensibilities, erotica, bad girl art [from comics] and monsters like The Bride of Frankenstein, The Creature from the Black Lagoon and Necromorphs, the Blood Puddin' girls are a horror fan's wet dream. For Capo, the marriage was natural.

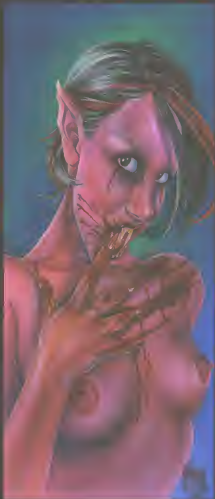
"It's a pretty big fan of Hammer horror and the Universal monsters," he explains. "And being an artist that's inspired to do mainly pin-ups — the whole intermingling of monsters and pin-ups just made sense. Even a harsh looking woman can have a real massive sex appeal, and what's more harsh than a couple of nasty brain transplant and autopsy scars? A few scales never hurt no one either, and let's not forget the long thing."

Capobianco, who's also a highly respected tattoo artist, has been painting for over twenty years, drawing inspiration from contemporary erotic artists like Olivia, Esquire and Playboy illustrator Alberto Vargas, as well as the notorious George Petty, whose "Pebly Girl" captured the hearts and loins of millions from 1933 to 1956, along with his favourite, 1930s Coca Cola artist Gil Elvgren. But it's Capobianco's interest in elegant horror films that distinguishes him from pin-up masters past.

"I've always been more of a classic horror fan," the Connecticut-based artist says. "Watching a film about some dopey college kids, kidnapped and tortured for the amusement of the rich and depraved really doesn't do



Mar-naders: (photomont Scrumptious, Forbidden de la Nuit, Bride of the Creature, and (opposite) Wedding Night.



"Even a harsh looking woman can have a real massive sex appeal, and what's more harsh than a couple of nasty brain transplant and autopsy scars?"

Joe Capobianco

it for me. Give me Christopher Lee seducing the last '70s chicks and Peter Cushing butting it all up. That's cool horror."


With two new art books on shelves — *What's Not To Like* and *The Joe Capobianco Sketchbook* (complete with an EC Comics-inspired cover, from Presto Art Publishing) — Capo's set to make his mark among the long lineage of pin-up artists. And with some zombie girl paintings and a set of horror subterfuge flash also coming down the pipe, one can't help but wonder whether the cordial Italian has a secret fetish for monster girls.

"I'm not diggin' on some creepy swamp thing gal," he admits. "But if I had to choose one I'd say it's the Brides of Dracula. I'd like to think he'd have a blonde, a redhead, and a brunette. Hell, he's Dracula!"

As for why he thinks the average Joe is turned on by bitches with stitches, Capo is lockadural.

"I think it's the same thing that gets a non outta people when they see women in Irish garb. There's just something dangerous about it. You don't know you've made a mistake on getting turned on by a monster gal until she's biting into your exposed heart. But it was fun up until that moment."

Dangerous Bitches: Finger Lickin' Good and (right) *Misses Stitches*.

To purchase one of Capo's books or limited edition art prints, visit joe-capobianco.com or pustellflash.com. 

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A series of Lovecraft-inspired anthologies from Japanese writers are giving new context to the Master's tales of madness. Rue Morgue investigates the late arrival of The Great Old Ones in Japan.

UNLEASHED IN THE EAST

LOVECRAFT IN JAPANESE LITERATURE

by JAMES GRANGER

A metaphysical investigator battles a gangster who has sold his soul to the water god Chhuat. A corrupt sensualist in Shanghai discovers the consequences of a pact between his anthropologist father and the worshippers of the snake god Igi. A husband begins to suspect that his wife's supposedly terminal cancer was cured by eating vegetables grown by a very reclusive commune of idolatrous farmers. To fans of author H.P. Lovecraft, these storylines will sound familiar yet strangely alien, as if a group of writers had fleshed out ideas from the Master's notebooks that his too-short life did not allow him to explore.

In their own way, that's what the authors of the stories collected in a new four-volume anthology entitled *Lairs of the Hidden Gods* have done, gone where Lovecraft did not have time to go, exploring landscapes of terror and paranoia only hinted at in the small body of work he left behind. The tales all take their inspiration from Lovecraft's Chhuat Mythos, a series of stories that, pieced together, reveal a pantheon of amoral god-like beings whose influence on human affairs is only guessed at by a handful of scholars, artists, madmen and backwoods lunatics.

Since Lovecraft's death in 1937, his Mythos has spawned a subgenre of stories and novels that has seen such luminaries as Robert E. Howard, Robert Bloch, Brian Lumley and Ramsey Campbell add their apocryphal tales to the original unholy texts. It was just a matter of time before Chhuat and his band of cosmic brothers made the trip overseas to Japan. The *Hidden Gods* anthologies, the first two volumes of which are now available in English translations from Kurodahan Press (the third is slated for release this

month, and the fourth in early 2007), take the Mythos and its tentacled, insanity-inspiring gods down even, distinctly Japanese paths that should surprise even hardcore fans of Lovecraft's alternative cosmos.

In keeping with its founder's original vision and mode of narrative attack, these new Mythos stories are usually centered around an isolated individual who is forced to unravel a mystery that lies outside the normal boundaries of time and Euclidean geometry. In perhaps the scariest of the tales, *Konoko Choko's Terror Rite*, a young woman who submits to what she believes is a controlled experiment in human responses to fear begins to realize that she has become the latest sacrifice to a strange being who might just be named "Chhuat." In *Import Of Terrors*, two starving boys seek shelter from an allied bombing raid in a strange mansion where they find a creature that looks like a sea cucumber and communicates telepathically, entombing the boys to come and eat its spongy flesh.

As in Lovecraft's best work (which is rooted in the particular landscapes and attitudes of early 20th-century New England), these authors root their horrors in a thoroughly Japanese milieu. Against the backdrop of Mount Fuji, Kabuki theatres and noodle houses, coastal towns and crowded tech-crazed cities, these new Mythos stories confront such distinctly Japanese obsessions as post-war guilt and the country's uneasy relationship with its feudal and pantheistic past.

The anthologies are the low child of editor and author Asamitsu Ken, whose novella *The Plague of St. James Infirmary*, a bizarre cultural cross-pollination that blends elements of the gangster story with Lovecraftian metaphysics and tradi-



tional Japanese warrior codes, kicks off the first volume.

"I first encountered Lovecraft's work when I was fourteen," says Ken. "The story was *The Case Of Charles Dexter Ward*. I was stunned by the way it pulled me in, and its superb structure. I felt that Lovecraft would be my mentor and guide in literature for the rest of my life."

He was especially enthralled with Lovecraft's alternative cosmology and the Mythos' central concept that human history has been influenced by an unseen race of ancient amoral beings.

"These ideas excited me, especially with my background in the occult," Ken explains. "Gods



had always been abstract concepts, but now they were threatening our very lives! The stones were perfectly designed to enrage a young boy who saw dreams of global catastrophe."

Ken was part of the first generation of Japanese readers who had access to a broad but incomplete body of Lovecraft's writings in translation, but there was much work to do to spread the Gospel of Cthulhu.

"When I entered high school I started a fanzine, working with fellow students to translate works by Lovecraft, write original horror and fantasy, study the occult and criticize everything," he says, adding that by the 1980s, Lovecraft's influence was being felt in Japanese fiction, film, video games and manga (Hideoshi Hino and Junji Ito are great examples of modern Lovecraft-inspired manga).

By this point, Ken, who had been working for Kokusho Kankokai, the Japanese publisher of Lovecraft and many other works of horror and fantasy, decided to write full-time. His first novel, *Phantom of the Devil Cult*, was published in 1985, and chronicles the travels of an aristocratic family cursed by a devil-worship cult. The contents earlier.

"The work itself was very Lovecraftian in nature, such as in the way the viscous, younger sister is gradually taken over by something inhuman, and the cult itself," he explains of the story "Banned in the Middle Ages, the cult is named 'kushiru', conveniently pronounced something like Cthulhu."

But English-speaking fans of J-horror may be surprised to learn that Lovecraft's pseudo-scientific, essentialist brand of horror has caught on in the land of haunted houses, reincarnated spirits and long-haired ghosts bearing murderous grudges.

"At a first glance it appears that Japanese horror has been little affected by Lovecraft," Asamatsu concedes. "Japan has its own thousand-year-old tradition of 'kowlaid' [roughly translated as tradi-

tional ghost stories]. The Japanese have always incorporated many spirits into their beliefs about life and death [and] into their art. But Lovecraft's blend of atheism and scientific rationalism has reminded modern Japanese that horror doesn't require chants, rituals or ghosts to make the hair stand on end. Lovecraft makes us recall that the evil gods can be summoned by merely a spiritual sickness, by hatred or fear."

The Japanese are very receptive to that message. "Japan is gripped by apprehension and fear today. It can be bursting with upbeat moods one day, and in the depths of hell the next."

In 1998, Ken thought of creating a fictional cursed city in Japan along the lines of Lovecraft's Arkham, getting horror and fantasy authors to write stories around the shared setting. This idea morphed into a 1999 anthology named *Maibu* ("The Hidden Gods"), a record of strange events occurring in a small town named Yatsura ("Yatsu" is a snake god from ancient Japanese legend, while "ura" means bay).

The anthology did not do well, however. "The book was published by a company that specialized in game strategy books and light young adult reading, and, unfortunately, never went anywhere," Ken admits. "That was also right after the Aum subway terrorist attack, and even a few people in the horror business thought it was a truly terrible choice of topics to publish right then."

Ken did not give up on his goal of publishing a successful anthology of Lovecraft-inspired fiction, but he needed to isolate an element of the Master's work that could both unite the stories into a thematic whole and let the contributors' imaginations go wild.

"It occurred to me that the Cthulhu Mythos itself could be a type of media to unite the stories," Ken recalls. "This eventually became the central theme to

Lairs of the Hidden Gods: the Mythos as a cultural medium. When I had that figured out, I phoned up an editor at publisher Tokyō Sogensha and we talked about it."

The concept caught on with the publisher and the Japanese horror writing community in a big way, attracting many of the best authors in the country. The anthologies, published in two Japanese-language volumes, also caught on with readers, and it wasn't long before the books attracted



Asamatsu Ken

interest from Kodansha Press, which was looking for works of Japanese horror to publish as part of their growing line of translations into English.

"This was exactly what they had been looking for: a cross-section of Japanese horror by best-selling authors," Ken says. "It was the perfect vehicle to introduce the range of Japanese talent to English readers, although obviously in the somewhat restricted field of Lovecraftian fiction."

The editors help introduce this strange world to Western readers with short introductions to each

of the stories, as well as in-depth, back-of-the-book essays and bibliographies on everything including Lovecraft's influence on manga, gaming and Japanese horror fiction.

Ken feels that the anthologies are only the tip of the Lovecraftian iceberg.

"The Mythos is still actively expanding and evolving," he says, "and it is so wonderful that the general public can be a part of the mechanism. I would not be surprised to see kindergarteners who play with Pokémon monsters some day shouting out 'Cthulhu' and 'Yog Sothoth' and 'Nyarlathotep!'"

Ken believes that the Cthulhu Mythos is a global language that will continue to draw new followers. "The next year it will spread to Korea and China, and two years later children in places like Thailand and Myanmar will see them in sun-mooning the evil gods. Surely you agree the future of humanity is bright indeed!" ☼



RUE MORQUE POKES AROUND IN THE WARPED
MIND OF ROBERT STEVEN RHINE, A JACK OF
ALL TRADES WHOSE WORK IS STEEPED
IN THE DARKEST OF HUMOUR.

THE NECRO-HUMOUR APOSTLE

BY DAVID L. YAMAMOTO

If you've ever fantasized about going to a stranger's wake, diving into the casket and having carnal relations with the corpse, you'll appreciate the works of Robert Steven Rhine. For years he's been carving out his niche of necro-humour in comics, short stories, animated features, graphic novels and, most recently, a website called *Girls and Corpses Magazine*; its motto: "So many corpses, so little time." Combining pitch-black humour, outrageous gore, Grand Guignol sensibilities, gorgeous babes and carnal freaks, Rhine's material exists to make horror fan, something to laugh at while you gag.

"I like to walk the knife blade between humour and horror. Something I call, 'humorror,'" says Rhine, who got his start in *Crawdad* magazine but always wished to work for its competitor, *Mad* (William Gaines, publisher of both *Mad* and *Teles From the Crypt*, had a huge influence on him). As a fiction author, screenwriter, actor and director, Rhine is something of a renaissance man. His graphic novel anthology, an EC Comics nod called *Satan's 3-Ring Circus of Hell* (co-written by Frank Forte from Asylum Press) combines the work of over 40 artists (Tim Vigil, William Stout, John Steel, OAK, D.W. Frydendall, Jeff Gauthier and Jim Smith of *Ren and Stimpy*, to name a few) to create a gruesome carnival of laughs, terrors, abjection and crude carnal horror. The title was a surprising success, and includes Rhine's award-winning story *Propeller Boy*, a personal tale of body horror that was best dark fiction at World Horror Con in 2005.

Girls and Corpses as the other hand is entirely Rhine's own menzies. Check full of necrophilia jokes, models posing with corpses and insane advice columns, it came about as a result of attending the San Diego Comic Convention one year. While working his booth, where he sold copies of his fiction collection and comics, he observed a steady flow of gorgeous women flocking to the mock corpses that decorated it (provided by Kevin Kneiss of The Ed Gein Collection). To his surprise, most of the women asked if they could touch and fondle the cadavers. This gave Rhine an idea.

"The purpose of *Girls and Corpses* is to create a new blend of comedy and horror with a MAGG-style men's magazine parody meets *Dawn of the Dead* twist," Rhine elaborates on the website he hopes to see in print by the end of the year. "The photos are creepy and horrific but they're also fun and sexy. If you find yourself laughing at *Girls and Corpses* and then wonder why, then I'm on the right track."

The author/director also believes his work is helping him deal with his own fear of death. His short story collection *My Brain Escapes Me* (1999, San Dog Press), includes a true account of a childhood accident that he says shaped his life forever. Ten-year-old Rhine was playing "duck the swing" with a sadistic childhood bully, who pushed a 200-pound iron



swing at him, crushing his head against a metal swing post. The impact tore Rhine's head open, leaving a gigantic hole as blood poured out "like the fizzle of Carlie." The bully's mother ended up shuffling dirty laundry into the gaping wound and a doctor (with the ominous name of Dr. Payne) sutured it with 64 stitches. Later, only 63 came out. The whereabouts of the last stitch is unknown. The childhood accident haunts him to this day and appears in much of his work.

"My friends, family and therapists have suggested that there is definitely something wrong with my brain. But until now it was only conjecture. Now, you know the truth. There really is something wrong with my brain," he writes in *The Utterly True Story Of What Happened To My Brain*, which will be published in his forthcoming book *X-Stream of Gossolous*.

In addition to his comics, books and magazine, Rhine recently directed and produced *SICKCOM*, an animated dark comedy currently travelling with the renegees Spike and Mike animation showcase. He describes it as, "...a take-off of a typical insane situation comedy with a laugh track and bad jokes. The only difference is that on *SICKCOM* the father is a serial killer, the mother is a domestic, the daughter has a porn webcam in her room, the son is a meth dealer, they have a crack baby, their dog is a nubile show poodle and their neighbor is a child molester... oh, and he's also a priest. Just your typical, ordinary American family."

Visit anykumpress.com for more on Robert Steven Rhine. ☛



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MONSTER HOUSE

Starring Mitchel Musso, Sam Lerner
and Spencer Locke
Directed by Gil Keren
Written by Don Harmon, Ron Schrab
and Pamela Pettler
Sony/Amblin

We all know the *Monster House* – every town's got at least one. Haddonfield had the Myers house, Salem's Lot had the Marsten house. They also show up regularly outside the genre, from *To Kill a Mockingbird* to Dylan Thomas' *A Child's Christmas in Wales*. As kids, most of us had some corresponding domicile in the 'hood – the house which, if not the scene of a legendary murder or full-on haunting, was at the very least occupied by some deranged, shadowy figure who hated the world.

But the titular dwelling in the 3-D animated *Monster House* isn't just haunted, it's a living, breathing, carnivorous badass that makes the Armayville place look about as threatening as a garden shed. DJ (Musso) lives across the way, and he and his dorky best friend Chowder (Lerner) have long sus-

pected the place's wretched old tenant Mr. Nebbercracker (Steve Buscemi) is up to no good. When misplaced toys sink into the lawn and people are sucked into the house's master maze, the kids simply have to investigate. Heck, it's their god-given gig as kids in a haunted house movie.

Enlisting the aid of the girl they both have a crush on (Locke), the two first sets about discovering who – not what – the house really is, then resolves to kill the thing. Hilarity, mass-destruction and near-death experiences ensue – as only they can in an animated film. Homage to haunted house milestones like *The Changeling* and *The Shining* are amusing (if kind of inevitable), and Lerner wears even a veiled nod to *Mui*. There's also great voice support from Maggie Gyllenhaal, Jason Lee and Jon "Napoleon Dynamite" Heder as a supremely sleazy video game champ.

Don't expect mind-blowing animation or design here, although both are more than adequate, and the motion capture applica-

tions serve the characters especially well. Instead, expect a funny, intelligent, supernatural and deliciously energetic kid's flick which, like its ancestors *Mad Monster Party*, *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *Monsters Inc.*, grown-up horror needs will find hard to resist. (And yes, "grown-up horror nerd" is an oxymoron.)

John W. Bowen

EVERYBODY OUTTA THE POOL!

LADY IN THE WATER

Starring Paul Giamatti, Bryce Dallas Howard
and M. Night Shyamalan
Written and directed by M. Night Shyamalan
Warner Bros.

What do M. Night Shyamalan, Martin Scorsese and David Lynch have in common? Well, there's this: their failures are more interesting than most other filmmakers' successes, which is why I'm glad I saw *Lady in the Water*, but only sorta.

The innate ridiculousness of *The Village*, Shyamalan's last film, was so perfectly offset by his charming script and astounding cast that I gladly suspended my disbelief with extreme prejudice, but this time out he delivers what could only be charitably described as an intermittently entertaining mess. *Lady in the Water* is an epic fairy tale unfolding entirely within the confines of a second-rate Philadelphia apartment complex as admittedly balmy move with less than charismatic results. Lurching drunkenly between lugubrious and ludicrous, this is the film I've long feared Shyamalan would make if he got in way over his head, and he's pretty much drowning here.

Howard (*The Village*) plays Story, a naïf, which is like a water nymph or spirit or some damn thing, who crawls out of the building's swimming pool in order to impart wisdom or some damn thing. She's being pursued by a scientist, a grass-dwelling critter that looks like the *Ginger Snaps* wolf covered in moss, and the film's ensue mythos henceforth becomes



way too convoluted to waste space on here. Story is taken in by Giamatti's character Cleveland Hoop (Dickensian enough for ya?), the building's deceptively blind superintendent, who finds he's an unwitting player in an ongoing diary tale. Turns out most of the tenants are too, as Hoop learns in fits and starts from a young Korean woman (a gloriously deadpan and deep-dish delicious Cindy Cheung) and her cantankerous mother (Jane Kyoto Lu).

Some wags have dubbed Shyamalan the Atom Egoyan of horror, which isn't a bad analogy given his dense plot lines and lycianism, except that by sharp contrast Shyamalan is also possessed of an infectious sense of humor, which in this case comes very close to saving the film. *Bicent* a post-*Scream* monologue from a sorority film critic (Bob Balaban) about how the rules of a horror film plainly indicate that he can't get killed... and then he gets killed. Touches like this do make *Lulu* frequently enjoyable, if not alternately worthwhile.

John W. Bowen

DOES GARNIS EVER SLEEP?

DESPERATION

Starring Tom Skerritt, Shane Habouchie and Ron Perlman
Directed by Mick Garris
Written by Stephen King
 Lionsgate

Desperation is the latest Stephen King novel to get the movie-of-the-week treatment, but it could also describe the prolific author's need for a hit after the ratings-challenged *Kingdom Hospital* failed to impress network execs. Directed by frequent collaborator, founding "Master of Horror" and cinematic workhorse Mick Garris, it's a confidently shot tell-all that works around a derivative story to bring King's nightmare worlds and characters to vivid life.

The film begins deep in the bleak Nevada desert, as maniacal Sheriff Ennigman—played with diabolical zeal by Ron Perlman—arrests innocent tourists and takes them back to a nearby ghost town, shooting sticky bullet holes in some and locking up others. Fearing for their lives, a cynical, ageing author (Tom Skerritt), hunchback Cynthia (Kelly Overton)



Sylvia Kellgren gets possessed as Mick Garris' newest Stephen King adaptation, *Desperation*

born-again protege David (Shane Habouchie) and their fellow prisoners manage to escape along the corpse-lined streets, only to learn the terrible truth—Ennigman is just the latest meat puppet possessed by an ancient force of evil known as Tik, and only David can pray for the divine counsel on how to stop it.

King's tonally disoriented screenplay, based on his 1996 book, indiscriminately recycles characters and plot devices from his better days—a young boy with special powers, a band of diverse people coming together, animals gone berserk—but wraps them up in a very personal exploration of spirituality. The film's pervasive religious angle is sure to turn off some fans, but in a post-9/11 world themes of reclaiming lost spirituality and questioning God's benevolence may work even better than when *Desperation* was originally published, even if it clearly ranks as one of King's lesser scripts.

With his camera low to the ground and using skewed angles that emphasize the grotesque in the everyday, Garris makes up for some of *Desperation*'s obvious redundancy with several spooky moments in a snake-infested supermarket and massed murder station. It's Perlman's alternately frightening and funny performance as the local sheriff that really steals the show, though, and the film's momentum never quite recovers after Tik moves on to greener pastures and newer bodies desperately seeking an equally com-

pelling antagonist.

So, wipe off those sweaty palms, *Desperation* may not be a full return to the glory days of *It* and *The Shining*, but it remains an interesting, occasionally frightening exercise that nevertheless makes a fine addition to King's small-screen output.

Paul Corupe

DANTE'S DEVILS

SATAN'S PLAYGROUND

Starring Felissa Rose, Ellen Sandwees and Edwies Neal
Written and directed by Dante Tomaselli
Anchor Bay Entertainment

What terrors await you in Satan's Playground? The terror-totter of lost souls' Monkey bars of the damned? A not-so-merry-go-round, perhaps? The answer is... none of these, because *Satan's Playground* is the latest feature from Dante Tomaselli, a very serious filmmaker. With heavy, devil-centric titles *Desecration* and *Howe* under his belt, it's no surprise the New Jersey director's latest feature is anything but playful. And that's A OK, because, really, there's a dearth of drop-dead serious fright films out there. Unfortunately, though, his latest also feels as lost in the forest as its characters.

The spindly woods in question are the New Jersey Pine Barrens, where a husband, wife,

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HAUNTED, EH?

CREEPLY CANADA (SEASON 3)

Starring Brian O'Dea, Mark Dunne, David Lowe, et. al
Directed by Chad Archibald, Bill Burke, Simon Gebicki et. al
Written by Paulette Bourgeois, Karen Gordon, Indra Sija et. al
Flamingo Neck Pictures

If you haven't seen the first two seasons of *Creepy Canada*, the third season certainly won't make you want to. There are thirteen episodes on this seven-disc (7) set, but it's a major chore just to make it past the first one.

Basically, the viewer goes along with a team of psychics, ghost hunters and "eyewitnesses" to various supposedly haunted locations across North America. The performances by the actors in the recreations aren't that bad, but the ones playing eyewitnesses speak painfully scripted monologues. Some of the lines are laugh-out-loud cheesy, as are the set-up sequences by host Brian O'Dea.

While some of the special effects don't look half bad, others are dreadful, like the Big Foot episodes, where it's just some dude running around in an ape suit, post-production green glowing eyes superimposed over his rubber mask. When the narrator is telling you these creatures are nine-foot tall and absolutely terrifying, and all you see is a 5'10" extra in an ape costume toting around, it kinda knocks the wind out of it.

Granted, there are occasional spine-chilling moments – the genuinely spooky *Ghost Of The Silver Run Tunnel* episode comes to mind – but for the most part, it's tedious. The psychics give their impressions of allegedly haunted prisons, graveyards, etc., the ghost hunters ooh and aah when their EMP devices start chirping, then the recreation scenes draw the story out far too long to maintain interest. At the end, the narrator poses the question: "Is such-and-such a place really haunted? And if so, is it really the restless spirit of so-and-so? You decide."

The thing about shows like this that really burns the ass is that there's never any marginally concrete evidence, save for little floating orbs on people's photographs, so-called psychics passing through cold spots (in drafty, disused facilities – what a shock!), and so-called eyewitness accounts which are anything but convincing.

Those who already believe in the existence of ghosts, aliens, and saquechiches will probably eat this stuff up, but for those skeptics out there, this series will do nothing to convert you.

Brett Alexander Savory



their autistic son, plus the wife's divorcee sister (*Evil Dead's* Ellen Sandness) and her newborn are driving to some unexplained vacation destination. As the mentally deficient member of the group, it's the son's job to sense first that something's flying overhead is following them. We never see it, but it's got claws and kills off minor characters (a hitchhiker, a cop, etc.). After getting the car stuck in the mud, the travellers soon discover there are other dangers in the woods as well.

The husband seeks help at the decrepit house of a creepy old palm reader, her childlike daughter and equally crazed son (original *Texas Chainsaw* *Murderer* hitchhiker Ed Neal). Killing ensues, but that's not all: there are also Satanists whipping a naked guy in the backyard – seriously affecting property taxes, no doubt. What these different elements have to do with each other is never explained – they simply exist together as horrors in, well, Satan's playground. Tomaszewski isn't concerned with a clear narrative, but rather with nightmare imagery, and he leaves some scrying impressions.

Tomaszewski, who also crafted an effectively creepy score for the film, is born-down a talented filmmaker trying to make genuinely evil and scary movies. With some help in the script department and a larger budget to flesh out some of his more grandiose ideas, he could really let those demons out to play.

Dave Alexander

BETTER THAN YOUR DRUNK COUSIN

THE ZODIAC

Starring Justin Chambers, Robin Tunney
and Philip Baker Hall
Directed by Alexander Bulckley
Written by Kelley Bulckley and Alexander Bulckley
THINKFilm

Way back in days of yore, I reviewed a rerelease of *The Zodiac Killer*, an obscure, welfare-state 1970s item based on the infamous and still unsolved series of murders that took place in northern California in the late '60s. And boy, did it suck. On its own, Alexander Bulckley's new film is a solid if unspectacular little number, but the previous one makes it seem rawrful, so it's a bit difficult to maintain the usual critical impartiality. It's kinda like the way your obnoxious, drunken behaviour at a wedding gets overlooked because your cousin Blake, fresh out of jail and plum out of his mind on online de casso and crystal meth, is stealing silverware and attempting to grope your speaker aunt on the dance floor. You've been there, haven't you?

Granted, there is a certain inherent pointlessness to a police procedural film based upon a case that was never solved, but at least Bulckley has the good sense to stick to known facts rather than go all Chris Fisher (*Nightmover*, *Awakeyake*) on us and fictionalize things beyond recognition. Importantly, Bulckley and his co-writer have the good sense not to put a name and face to the killer. One of the earlier film's more laughable shortcomings was the characterization of Zodiac as a rabbit-fancying postal worker. Period authenticity is furnished via news footage of Vietnam, Nixon, race riots and go-go girls, while clips from *The Most Dangerous Game* playing on a TV are a race thematic touch.

The script is mediocre at best, but a surprisingly strong cast – Justin Chambers as a frustrated detective, Robin Tunney (*The Craft*) as his frustrated wife and the venerable Baker Hall (*Magnolia*) as his really, really, frustrated boss – help the film rise above itself. Like all subgenres, the



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OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED THIS ISSUE: LANCE TRAVELS TOO FAR

BEACH SUMMER

TRESPASSERS

Mariposa Entertainment

The cover art of *Trespassers* promises a movie in the same vein as *Shout of the Dead* with the added bonus of busty bikini babes and blood-red surf. Alas, it was all too good to be true and I found myself yawning through a tale of five friends driving down the deserted Mexican coast looking for the perfect surf spot when they run into a cult of screaming cannibals intent on having them for supper. Awkward acting, horribly amateur surf footage, zero zombies and a completely lame-as-wilkin-remmed El Gringo reeks of faulty advertising. If you really want to see something horrifying from a Mexican/American co-production, chew down on some unrefrigerated Taco Bell leftovers and wait awhile.

Body Count: 11

Hot Chicks Urinating On The Beach: 1



WATER HOME MASSACRE

Lionsgate

Seven friends on a road trip in their RV encounter a serial killer in what should have been a cool new entry in the latest batch of '80s-inspired slasher movies. Though there are some imaginative death scenes (including a particularly brutal "naked-gal-in-a-lens" hack 'n' slash), fart jokes, a horrible soundtrack and a killer with an obviously plastic machete drive this one right off a cliff. It also doesn't help when the moronic "twist" ending is completely foreseeable, or that the chainsaw depicted in the cover art never makes an appearance. Most importantly, though, if you're going to pre-empt a super-hot three-way lesbian scene just before it really gets interesting, your movie deserves a place propping up the short leg of the video store delete bin.

Body Count: 8

Corpses Urinated On: 1



WAMPIRE WHORES

FROM OUTER SPACE

Razor Sharp Productions

There are three basic rules for dealing with vampire whores from outer space. First: find them. Second: don't let them suck on your pee-pee. Third: kill 'em all! When a UFO crashes in a backwoods town, it spits out its precious cargo of vampire hookers who proceed to suck the local gentry dry (judge-judge, wink-wink). It's up to a sexy cheerleader and a computer nerd to take on the space sluts and their slimy green pimp in what has to be one of the funniest ultra-low budget vampire flicks out there. A lack of special effects and poor sound are made up for by the film's dark humour and witty dialogue. Plus, the tongue-in-cheek black ally abortion scenes will have you giggling in disgust and laughing your ass off at the same time. Obviously recommended.

Body Count: 6

Vampire-Related Urination: 0



straight-to-video, fact-based serial killer film has become an increasingly cookie-cutter affair, and Bulkeley wisely avoids some of the usual pitfalls of ridiculous speculation and horrible ADD edits, resulting in a competently executed, perfectly watchable thriller. Hey, it'll look even better the next time Chris Fisher grants one out.

John W. Bowen

DEAD AIR WAVES

THE BOOTH

Starring Ryuta Sato, Hime Kojima

and Mansaku Beatchi

Written and directed by Yoshihiro Nakamura

Tartan Asia Extreme



Japan's long and illustrious affair with all things ghostly and vengeful has produced some decidedly creepy offspring such as *Ringu*, *Ju-On*, and *Dokkiri*. Now Tartan Asia Extreme gives us another in the long line of eerie J-horror flicks with *The Booth*, and it won't disappoint fans of the phantasmagorical.

While his studio is being renovated, radio talk show host Shogo (Sato) is forced to move his popular call-in show *Love Lines* to the outdated Studio 6. The space has been abandoned since its former occupant committed suicide during a bizarre broadcast years earlier, and when Shogo's show goes live, he experiences some of the same strange manifestations as his predecessor. Soon enough he finds out that even long-dead secrets have a way of disorienting themselves.

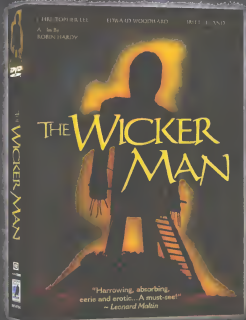
Though it plays out more like an extended episode of *The Twilight Zone* than a feature, *The Booth* delivers enough of a paranormal punch that its lack of cinematic flair is easily overlooked. Director Yoshihiro Nakamura (who also co-wrote *Dokkiri*) demonstrates a keen eye for claustrophobic settings by keeping most of the action inside the tight walls of the decrepit studio. Expository flashbacks keep the movie going while delivering enough back story to keep you in suspense. Even the scenery chewing by the cast only adds to the kitschy melodrama.

If there is anything bad to say about the film, it comes from a technical standpoint. Like so many shot-on-video titles, there are some problems with sound fidelity and colour consistency, but they're minor. *The Booth* delivers its horror with atmosphere rather than geysers of claret - it's fraught with internal tension, and the audience is hooked by the promise of a secret revealed. This movie is proof positive that what we can see or touch is nearly more horrifying than what we cannot.

Kenneth Bonnie

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Meet Spain's MARTÍN GARRIDO BARÓN, a former child prodigy, on accomplished painter and the director of one of the most vibrant and vicious movies in the genre, *H6: DIARY OF A SERIAL KILLER*.

CHAINSAW

Poetry

BY DAVE ALEXANDER

From the lush atrocity depicted in Goya's literal 1918 painting *Satan Devouring His Son*, to the gorgeous gore of Nacho Cerdá's autopsy-themed short film *Aftermath*, the Spanish love proving themselves adept at feeding the beauty in brutality. The latest example of this artistry comes courtesy of Martín Garrido Barón, a 24-year-old painter/filmmaker, whose recently released feature *H6: Diary of a Serial Killer* (Tartan Video) sublimely showcases a series of deaths at the sick hands of a particularly cunning and savage murderer.

Written by the young filmmaker's father, Martín Garrido, the film has garnered comparisons to *Se7en*, *Natural Born Killers*, *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* and, most often, Eli Roth's *Hostel*. It stars Fernando Acaso as Antonio Frau, a seemingly mild-mannered man just released from prison after serving 25 years for killing his girlfriend. When he learns he's inherited a former brother, Antonio moves into the building and hatches a devious plan. He turns one of the rooms (numbered H6) into a torture chamber, where he lures local prostitutes and terrorizes them for days before dispatching them, often with a chainsaw. Keeping his actions a secret from his new bride, he meticulously details the horrors in a diary. It's all part of a master plan — also involving local police investigating the disappearances — to gain public notoriety.

"Antonio Frau is a man with dreams of grandeur and the only thing he wants is to enter history as one of the best serial killers," explains Barón, comparing *H6* to Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers*. "I don't like Oliver Stone's film, although I admire him — *U2 Rattle and*

other of his films. The message of my film is that justice and law, or whatever you want to call it, is worth shit. People laugh at justice. That's my message."

Talking at the Roth comparison, he adds, "I didn't like *Hostel* either, and it doesn't have anything to do with my movie."

A beautifully shot journey into the sickest regions of an ambitious serial killer's mind, *H6* is an inspired bit of chainsaw poetry from one of the

my dad introduced me to when I was thirteen," he explains.

There's certainly a touch of *Witties* in *H6*, with its deliberate, measured camerawork (courtesy of cinematographer Sergio Delgado), but Barón's painterly background is also very apparent — in the cool greens and hot reds that strongly contrast with neutral backgrounds.

"*H6* is like a painting of the colours I use in my paintings. That is how my life is painted," says

"THE MESSAGE OF MY FILM IS THAT JUSTICE AND LAW, OR WHATEVER YOU WANT TO CALL IT, IS WORTH SHIT."

MARTÍN GARRIDO BARÓN

genre's most talented up-and-coming young directors. Unlike *Hostel*, *R* has a lyrical quality which contrasts with violence that is sometimes explicit but never gratuitous or jolty.

Barón, who was only 21 when he began working on the film, was first considered a child prodigy for his paintings. He was working on canvas by age nine, and by seventeen had his work shown in a gallery. His love of film started much earlier though, with his father taking him to the cinema when he was six.

"If you want to know why I dedicate myself to cinema, it is because of the more than twenty times I have seen all of Orson Welles' films, which

Barón. "My paintings are something that I have inside me, same as my movies... *H6* has much of my visual work in it. [Critics] have said that I am one of the best directors in terms of the camera eye."

Barón, who shot one feature on video as a teenager before making *H6*, says he's already planning to shoot another film about a killer. But with an unusual twist.

"If everything goes well and I find a foreign producer, I'll make *Aspicio* [*"I Aspire"*], an original script that I wrote. The protagonist, who is two metres tall, is a killer who has problems with his mother." ☞



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Resembling a Clive Barker adaptation of Dante's *Inferno* directed by Mario Bava at his most visually sumptuous, Nobuo Nakagawa's masterwork *JIGOKU* gets the royal treatment from Criterion.

HELL, UNEARTHED

BY TOM MES

Back when *The Ring* was just a glint in Sadako's doopy eye, and the only things Kiyoshi Kurosawa and Hideo Nakata knew about ghosts was what their mothers told them at bedtime, the true master of Japanese horror plied his trade. Nobuo Nakagawa may still be a virtual unknown outside his native land, but his obscurity abroad is more than balanced out by his fame at home; the late filmmaker is the greatest director of horror films Japan has ever spawned.

What do we know about the history of Japanese horror? For all its recent popularity, not much at all, really. Most of what made it across the Pacific consisted of one-offs, exceptional detours through the genre by directors who normally operated elsewhere in the cinematic spectrum. For all its staggering beauty and atmosphere, Kurosawa remains the odd one out in Masaki Kobayashi's humanist/political filmography, just as Ozu and Kurosawa were all the horror Kenji Mizoguchi had in him.

Not so with Nobuo Nakagawa. The director may have started his career in the early 1930s helming slapstick comedies and musicals, but by the time the '50s rolled around, he was channeling out ghostly tales at the rate of five a year. Vengeful apparitions reemerged from their watery tombs, cat spirits taking bloody revenge for their dead owners, disfigured ghosts returning to claim those who sent them to their graves — Nakagawa's shadowy world has old-time atmospherics to spare. Imagine Terence Fisher and Ted Browning subsumed in the realm of Japan's hellish picture scrolls and you come somewhere close to Nakagawa's stylish and occasionally gory renditions of scary folk tales

like *The Ghost of Yotsaya*, the country's most enduringly popular chronicle of vengeance from beyond the grave.

Nakagawa had more acres up his sleeve than costume horrors, though. With films like *The Vampire Moth* and *The Lady Vampire*, he delivered more Western-styled exercises, giddy but stylish romps complete with pinky teeth, dwarf assistants and labyrinthine underground lairs. He could even turn Hitchcockian, with rebiters like *Death Row Women*, a fast thriller about a woman wrongfully sentenced to the chair for poisoning her own father, who tries to prove her innocence while on the run from the law.

Those who have been enjoying the recent surge of Japanese Pinky Violence movies like *Sex & Fury*, *Deliquent Girl Boss* and *Zero Woman: Red Handcuffs* (RMAF) will be intrigued to know that Nakagawa also helped lay the foundations of that hot-blooded genre with spicy tales of female outlaws such as *A Wicked Woman* and *Gladius the Avenger*.

If all of this makes you curious, there is good news. Nakagawa is coming to North American DVD this month, courtesy of Criterion, which has decided to jump in at the deep end and release the film that is without doubt the director's greatest creation: *Jigoku*. A delicious descent into Hell (literally — the title translates simply as

"Hell"), his 1960 magnum opus documents the karmic retribution visited upon hapless student Shiro (Shigen Aisachi, who would later star in and co-produce a string of films with Spanish genre icon Paul Naschy), driven to murderous mania by a fiendish dissolute who acts as his lap of the perverse.

Things start with a hit and run and grow gradually worse. Deaths accidental and premeditated pile up around him, until our protagonist himself kicks the bucket in a drunken binge featuring poisoned alcohol and all the terrors of a retirement home. Transported to the afterlife, Shiro witnesses and undergoes the full range of diabolical tortures endured by the sinful-naked humans are boiled alive or impaled on stone spikes, heads are lopped off, bodies are skinned and eviscerated,

and the list goes on.

Nakagawa constructs his bleak but grotesque vision of the netherworld with an impressive array of visual trickery, taking in-camera effects as far as they can go. The end result resembles a Clive Barker adaptation of Dante's *Inferno*, directed by Mario Bava at his visually sumptuous best. Remade twice (including a recent, rather bargain-basement rendition by Tetsu Ichii, available on DVD under the title *Japanese Hell*, but never equalled in its scope, its beauty or its cruelty, Nobuo Nakagawa's *Jigoku* remains a sight to behold for even the most jaded horror fan's eyes. ☸

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— GUILLERMO DEL TORO, director of *Hellboy*, *Buried* & *Pan's Labyrinth*

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INDIE TERROR FEST!

BY JOHN W. BOWEN

THIS ISSUE: BATTLE-SCARRED INDIE MUSICIAN JOHN W. BOWEN ASSESSES THREE INDIE FILMS ABOUT FICTITIOUS INDIE BANDS.

WILDMAN BEAVER

Written and directed by Kevin Strange
Hack Movies

Here's a new one, kids: members of a struggling band are having some artistic differences. Frontman Willy Nut-sack wants to keep it prog-metal while the bass player is in a decidedly emo place. And as much as I wanted to see Willy prevail — and hence see Rush prevail over Hoobastank — I must "Yess up that I fell asleep before the murder was decided, as shot-on-washed-out-looking-video-tape rec-room efforts full of bad jokes tend to have that effect on me. I kept regretting consciousness often enough to glean that the band members were also being systematically killed off by some evil entity in a really cheap Halloween costume, but solid recollections pretty much end there. Kudos pains me to bash this film "cause a visit to the website (hackmovies.com) would indicate these people are simply a fun-loving crew of merry pranksters. Too bad their film isn't nearly as much fun to watch as it probably was to make.



BACKSTAGE PASS

Directed by Jake K. Smith
Holland Imagination

In an opening voice-over, we're informed that Liquid Zoo, a band as mediocre as its name would indicate, almost made the big time but fell short. As soon as we join them on the road, we get our first inkling that this thing was written by somebody woefully short on first-hand experience, since these ass-clowns are playing clubs and touring in a van with a

road crew and three (?) managers. Their sound guy gets murdered after a show, but they decide to soldier on and head to a remote rural recording studio to work on their next album. A storm hits, the power goes out and whoever killed that roads at the last gig gets down to stalking and slashin'. So who's the killer? Who cares? The real mystery here is how William Katt (yes, Carrie White's prom date, and star of the cult horror-comedy *House*) wound up in a fifth-rate shot-on-dodgy-video slasher film.

THE CHOKE

Directed by Justin Mas
Velocity Home Entertainment

The Choke is a silly name for a movie, and an even sillier name for a band which, in this case, is about to play one last club show before breaking up. After a tedious half-hour of tickering and sub-Kevin Smith platitudes, a naked dead chick turns up. The gig is cancelled and everyone leaves except the band, the singer's girlfriend and brother, the club owner, his girlfriend and a homeless guy. For various really, really contrived reasons, they wind up stuck inside the building and spend the next hour getting killed in really, really contrived ways (bass player gets chopped up with... her bass?). Performances are competent, production values solid and co-star Brooke Bailey is really nice to look at, and that's as close as I can get to recommending *The Choke*, which is to say, I'm not.

In closing, I will call upon my experience as an ageing rocker to impart a

few tips to any other aspiring filmmakers who put fictitious bands in their movies: Rock clubs do not have spacious backstage areas, drummers — at least the ones who aren't total losers — do not carry drumsticks around with them 24/7, and the term "grape" has not been used since the late '70s. Instead, try "patron of the arts," "can dumpster" or "Pamela Anderson."





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REISSUES



One of the scarier puppets in Canuck cult classic *Rock 'n' Roll Nightmare*

HELLFIRE AND HAIRSPRAY

ROCK 'N' ROLL NIGHTMARE (1987)

Starring Jon-Miki Thor, Jim Onle and Frank Dietz
Directed by John Fasano
Written by Jon-Miki Thor
Synapse Films

"Frochallin' or not, I still had the hammer ready - nothing stops the hammer!" - Thor describing his shower love scene on the DVD commentary for *Rock 'n' Roll Nightmare*

Some cult films are cult films because, intentionally or unintentionally, they create a unique, treasured cinematic experience - they capture lightning in a bottle. *Rock 'n' Roll Nightmare*, Canada's best "bad" movie, starring bodybuilder-named-Viking glam rocker Jon-Miki Thor, does one better - it captures Valhalla in a snow globe.

Also known as *The Edge of Hell* (the title on this private print, struck from the original negative), the movie follows rockers

The Trixie while they're sequestered in an Ontario farmhouse for a recording session. Led by Thor (sporting hair almost as big as his peck), the band pounds out hammer-shaken anthems - such as *We Live To Rock and Energy* - all the while oblivious to the demonic forces gathering in their midst. The evil entities set about possessing the band members, their groupies and manager in a plot that's mostly incomprehensible but hell-bent for fun.

Behold a cracked kaleidoscope of rubber monster puppets, unforgettable one-liners ("I'll see you again, Old Scratch!"), a wolfboy, ample T&A, dime-store pyrotechnics, a choke-out with the fibreglass Devil himself, and a codpiece that could only be forged in the flames of '80s guitar glam. Rejoice in your claim to the cult of cinephile, all ye who have not yet supp'd at the seat of *Rock 'n' Roll Nightmare*!

For those already acquainted with the

film, the pot of awesome at the end of the DVD rainbow are the extras. Synapse Films has not only cleaned up the audio and visuals and given it a poster-worthy metallic cover, they've added liner notes, behind-the-scenes footage, several featurettes, music videos and a commentary. Narrated by Thor and director John Fasano (*Black Roses*), it's a gut-busting rip on the movie full of bizarre behind-the-scenes anecdotes about how a ten-day shoot became a seven-day shoot, why a \$100,000 budget was actually a \$55,000 budget (!), and just why they were forced to shoot the infamous temerarious driving sequence at the beginning. The filmmakers' underdog enthusiasm is lovable, and they trade barbs like seasoned comedians (Thor: "They broke the mould when we made this movie." Fasano: "They broke the mould when they made your jock-strap.") Frochallin' or not, *Rock 'n' Roll Nightmare* brings the thunder.

DAVE ALEXANDER

NOIRSPLOITATION ORGY

SINGAPORE SLING (1990)

Starring Meredith Herold, Michele Valley and Pencie Thantassoula
Written and directed by Nikos Nikolaidis
Synapse Films

Sweet merciful knik! If ever there were a hidden exploitation gem to unearth, Nikos Nikolaidis' *Singapore Sling* is it, quite possibly the most bizarrely erotic and equally nauseous picture ever made. Imagine John Waters' *Polser* (1983) meets Carl McDowell's *Thelma&Louise*? (1975) meets a Greek tragedy meets an Anthony Spina porn movie and you're halfway there. Now throw in vomit sex, golden showers, sado-masochism, necrophilia, cannibalism, fruit masturbation, electroshock sex, mother-on-daughter hermaphrodite incest, a penis-knife raping, a 1940s detective story, an orgy of black humour and you've got one hell of a conspiracy movie.

Meredith Herold and Michele Valley star as a wealthy and deprived mother-daughter duo living in an elegant house of shame. Shot in high-contrast black and white, the film opens with the women digging a muddy grave in the rain - in their lingerie, without panties, of course. Father, who previously took care of body disposal, has died, leaving the women to fend for themselves after they've killed their chauffeur. They role play their fetishistic urges (including a dining



scene in which "mom" hangs "daughter" with what we're led to believe is her own penis until a detective they call Singapore Sling (Pavlos Thanasoulis) comes knocking.

The distraught dock arrives in search of a woman he loved and lost named Lauro, who may or may not have met her end at the hands of the two sexual superfiends. Before long he's imprisoned and tortured by the gruesome twosome — raped, electrocuted, puked and posed on — and so forth and so on. Worse are the dinner scenes in which they wolf down shellfish, lamb brains, eyes, cake and wine — all at once, with gag-inducing sound design and extreme close-ups.

Singapore Sling is a rindfuck of a movie, thematically and visually ransacking Kaneto Shindo's brilliant *Oshichiyo* (1964), as the two women war over sexual domination of their prey, and it's also strangely reminiscent of rape and revenge flicks like *Last House on the Left* (1972) and *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978). It plays out like a stylish noir with extreme, nearly pornographic exploitation material, and breaks convention through mixing languages (French, Greek and English), addressing the audience and even showing multiple takes at times. It's weird, graphic, disgusting, ugly, repulsive, delightful and crude at the same time. That bizarre personality disorder aside, *Singapore Sling* is one of the most aesthetically beautiful films ever committed to celluloid. Kudos to Synapse for retrieving this lost piece of perverted cinematic pie.

Jevanka Vuckovic

FRANCO AIN'T NO HACK

SUCCUBUS (1968)

Starring Janine Reynaud, Jack Taylor and Howard Vernon

Directed by Jess Franco

Written by Pier A. Carmineo

Blue Underground

By now most horror film scholars are (in some cases partially) aware of the erratic



Succubus: Director Jess Franco at his S&M best

output of iconic Spanish genre director Jess Franco. He's made far more outright unwatchable disasters than his visionary masterpieces and he was, and still is, both a music buff and a highly accomplished jazz musician. It is his love of jazz and his fusion of the loose jazz aesthetic to the narrative rules of cinema that have resulted in his greatest works. From the *Diabolical Dr. Z* to *Fetus in Furs* to the film we'll briefly examine right now, Franco worked best when producers would let him "play" a movie and *Succubus* (a.k.a. *Nemesis*) is no exception.

One of the saucy late-'60s films Franco made for elegant perv producer Adrian Hoven (*Mark of the Devil*), *Succubus* sets the psychedelic sexy tone for many of his subsequent endeavors. A hotter than hell stripper/performance artist, played by Franco regular Reynaud, is somehow slowly transformed into a homicidal nympho leech by her shady stage manager (cult French actor/director Michel Lemerle). She then enters a foggy world of S&M orgies, bourgeois decadence and wild period fashion crimes. At this point, *Succubus* abandons

narrative clarity almost entirely and wallows in pure free-form hallucinatory excess, where nothing is what it seems and badly dubbed dialogue reigns supreme.

All of Franco's voyeuristic obsessions seen in previous films — are evident in *Succubus*. From the sexy stripping fiend (Reynaud, Lesbo), to the POV shots off the hood of the car (*Female Vampire*) and the S&M "show" (*Evilwoman*), the chief difference here is that he actually has a decent budget to make it look and sound slick and debaucherous. Anything but scary, the film relies on its amazing score by the late experimental jazz pianist Friedrich Gulda to make its considerable insanity gel, and the lovely, uninhibited performance from Reynaud to make it sizzle. Blue Underground supplies a restored widescreen print in original mono and even throws in new, informative interviews with Franco and Eurodance icon Jack Taylor.

Succubus is, if nothing else, further proof that the always interesting Franco is anything but a hack.

Chris Alexander

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After years of slugging it out in the trenches on formulaic genre sequels, filmmaker Jeff Burr decided it was time to make the movie he wanted to make – the surreal, uncompromising war-horror film *Straight into Darkness*.

'THE ART' OF WAR

by James Grainger

Don't believe the skeleton-faced Nazi soldiers on the DVD cover for *Straight into Darkness*. Director Jeff Burr's creepy new existential horror flick does not feature any EC Comics ghosts fighting the bad fight for the Führer. In fact, the story of two WWII American soldiers lost in the western European countryside as the German army retreats isolates no supernatural elements or waxy "Boo!" moments at all.

That said, *Straight into Darkness* – recently released by MCA Home Video – is one of the most daring and atmospheric American horror films in years. After a tense standoff in a minefield between the WWII soldiers and their captives, Burr (in an extended sequence that features almost no dialogue) follows his anti-heroes through a bizarre, rusted landscape of bombed-out churches, rising sandbars, abandoned villages, murdered children. One particularly haunting scene features trees hung with the mutilated bodies of suspected collaborators.

"This movie came from a very subconscious place within me, not a literal place, so a lot of stuff on the screen is not explained, and that's good," Burr tells *Rue Maguire*, noting that he expects viewers to bring their own interpretations

to the moody, allegorical story. "It is not a passive movie to watch. You've got to engage yourself in the film."

The real horror of *Straight into Darkness* is in the pained faces and memories of the survivors, who have become living ghosts in a giant winter graveyard. The waste of human life and potential comes to a chilling climax in the gruesome second half when the soldiers are taken captive by a group of orphaned children trained by a pair of kindly schoolteachers to kill the occupying Nazis.

Bringing the film to viewers has been a long journey for Burr, who, after his impressive 1987 genre debut, *From a Whisper to a Scream* (MCA/SS), spent much of the next 14-year years doing gun-for-hire director's work on sequels like *Leatherface: The Chainsaw Massacre II*, *Pumpkinhead 2* and *Puppet Master 5*. Burr thought about the concept for *Straight into Darkness* for years, but it wasn't until his father's death in 2000 that he decided to make the film, even if it meant handing it over.

"I never thought of going to any studio with this film for money, probably obvious, maybe," says Burr, pointing out that his film lacks obvious Hollywood hooks.

"I can not – in any way – a director with any kind of clout, critical or commercial," he adds bluntly.

Burr's father's death brought him back to his home state of Georgia, where he was reunited with childhood friend and film producer Mark Hamish, who encouraged him to go ahead with the ambitious project. Burr used a small inheritance from his father to get the ball rolling.

"You could say that this was a director's mid-life crisis on screen. It was a guy trying to because the filmmaker that he wanted to be at age 20, when he made his first student film," he jokes.

After lucking into a pair of cheap airline tickets, Burr and Hamish flew to Romania to scout locations (Burr had already filmed two low-budget studio movies there using a local film crew). The DIY nature of the project meant that when *Straight into Darkness* finally went into production, he even cast some real-life Romanian orphans. It's one of the choices that enhances the film's desperate, realistic edge, overcoming its budgetary limits.

Though Burr has plans for another independent film, he's returned to the life of the hired gun for now, directing a movie called *The Devil's Den*.

"I'm sure many people would dismiss me as an interesting filmmaker by glancing at my IMDb page," he admits. "But I learn on every movie and feel that the more you do, the more you know. I look at every movie I've done the same way, by asking, 'How am I going to put myself in this thing and make it my own?'"





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As two reissued Brazilian women-in-prison films exemplify, aside from the occasional murder and Satanic orgy, it ain't so bad doing time in some South American jails—

LURID LOCK-UP!

by THE GORE-MET

The women-in-prison genre ranks with its leg-lickin' cinematic cousin the exploitation film as about the sincerest to be found this side of hardcore pornography. It has a simple and well-defined formula—an innocent girl is framed, jailed by a corrupt judiciary or kidnapped and thrown

into captivity with an overly violent population of ruble, barely clothed women lorded over by sadistic prison staff. The girl will fend off the advances of cruel dykes and greedy slobs and endure a little torture for doing so, before finding love with a guilt-ridden alcoholic authority figure who will eventually revolt and

facilitate a mass escape, bringing down the administration of an evil warden and assorted minions. Plot points are punctuated by casual nudity, group showers, catfights, and much softcore sex, mainly of the lesbian variety. Take these two recent reissues from Blue Underground for example:

BARE BEHIND BARS (1980)

Starring Maria Stella Splendore, Marta Anderson and Danielle Ferrelle
Written and Directed by Oswaldo De Oliveira



Based on genre-defining criteria of nudity and sex, De Oliveira's *A Prisão* (given the exiguous English title *Bare Behind Bars*) rates as one of the greatest WP films ever made. This nether doesn't go three minutes without exposed breasts, full-frontal nudity or lesbian sex scenes that occasionally take a turn toward the hardcore.

The film is set in a dank, rat-infested prison in an unnamed country so poverty stricken its penal system suffers a dire shortage of buttons and women's undergarments. The prison is ruled by an attractive, capacious ice-queen who gulps gals and booze to overcome the effects of nightly lesbian sex sessions. The inmates do little else than take group showers that break out in random acts of sex and pass a large dildo between their cells so they can have more sex. And the guards ain't shy about bickering up their skirts and joining in either!

After an inmate is murdered and the cells are tossed for hidden weapons, the prison nurse finds a straight razor secreted in an inmate's vagina. She admonishes the prisoner with, "I could have you sent to solitary! Instead, I want you to take... a bath. And when you're through, I'll give you a massage." Now this is my kind of prison!

There isn't much of a plot; the babes thrown-to-the-wolves angle—or coups in this case—is ill-developed, but the horror elements come into play towards the, er, climax. Three inmates bust out with the aid of the nurse, and while on the lam invade a family home, kill the mother, slice off the penis of the father and feed it to the family dog (!), and molest a young boy! Simply jaw-dropping!

AMAZON JAIL (1982)

Starring Elizabeth Hartman, Mauricio de Valle and Sandra Gatti
Directed by Oswaldo De Oliveira
Written by Oswaldo De Oliveira and Alfredo Pollicino

Curul de Mulheres is a white slavery film in the cruel tradition of *Red, Hot and Blue* (1955). An ugly brute, along with his sexually confused lover and his nephew, run a white slavery ring in a well-appointed compound deep in the jungle, turning ruble young women into their clutches to be sold to wealthy businessmen as sex toys. The nephew falls in love with one of their prisoners and facilitates a mass escape that sees his uncle and lover killed and the compound destroyed. That conventional plot line is resolved within an hour; then film takes a left turn.

While trying to survive in the jungle, unaware that a well-armed rescue party is searching for them, six of the girls are taken captive by some workers from a covert gold-mining operation run by an effete, egomaniacal priest and his homosexual attendant. In a bid to escape a dire fate at the hands of horny lowlives, one of the girls offers herself to the priest, who rebuffs her, saying, "I've always hated women! I've been in the jungle too long now that I'm only accustomed to men." Enter the rescue party, cue satanic orgy!

Amazon Jail, while filled with triple depravity, isn't as delightfully offensive or effective as De Oliveira's earlier master(sat)orgy. **B**



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IN THE SHADOW OF HAMMER

THE AMICUS COLLECTION

Directed by Roy Ward Baker and Paul Annett
Dark Sky Films

Hammer Film Productions may have put UK horror on the map, but when the studio was having trouble staying relevant in the turbulent 1970s, it was upstart fright peddler Amicus who really kept the British end up throughout much of the decade. Started by ex-pat New Yorkers Max J. Rosenberg and Milton Subotsky in 1962, Amicus offered up grittier thrillers that owed much to (and EC comics such as *Jack of Horror* and *Tales From the Crypt*). Though the studio managed only a few dozen films before gasping its last in 1980, its influence on horror filmmaking is an important one that's nicely showcased by Dark Sky's new *Amicus Collection*, featuring a trio of 1970s entries: *Asylum*, *And Now the Screaming Starts!* and *The Beast Must Die*.

Like its comic page inspirations, Amicus built its legacy by specializing in horror anthologies that dripped with dark humor. *Twelve* (1972), directed by Hammer alumnus Roy Ward Baker, is undoubtedly one of the company's finest and well-wrought productions — four tantalizing tales by Psycho scribe Robert Bloch, all ingeniously framed within the story of a job-seeking psychiatrist who must listen to the case histories of mental institution inmates and identify the now-mute ex-director in order to get hired.

There's one predictable chunker starring Charlotte Rampling as a disturbed young girl who can't stop a friend from murdering her family, but the others are satisfyingly macabre. The first involves a man who can't escape his murdered wife's leopped-off limbs, then a mysterious stranger (Peter Cushing) contracts a ruler to make a unique suit that can bring back the dead, and, finally, Herbert



Asylum: Peter Cushing in search of a resurrection suit

Leem appears as a scientist who can project his soul into killer toy robots. Stylishly shot and genuinely creepy, *Asylum* is one of Amicus' most outstanding horror films, and the crown jewel of this trio of releases.

The following year, Baker unleashed the misleadingly titled *And Now the Screaming Starts!* (1973), an 18th-century ghost story that comes closest to replicating Hammer's Gothic style. In the film, the haunted Catherine (Sophistic Beauchamp) marries in with her rich fiancé Charles Fenngiffles (Ian Ogilvy), but is plagued by visions of severed hands and an eyeless ghost. She's sure it's caused by some family curse, but her husband refuses to talk about the Fenngiffles estate's past, even after Catherine is apparently raped by a spectral presence. As Dr. Pepp, Peter Cushing arrives for the last half of the film to make sense of the whole thing. The thick atmosphere doesn't make up for the slow plotting and weak effects, however, which prompted Rosenberg and Subotsky to correct the *pelty* title and garish poster featuring a severed hand, the two best things about this picture, unfortunately.

The final DVD in Dark Sky's Amicus line, Paul Annett's *The Beast Must Die* (1974), may be the first and only whodunit where the object is to expose not only a murderer, but

also a werewolf. This Agatha Christie-influenced take on the Lon Chaney Jr. classic plays out like a parlour mystery movie with over-the-top scenes of horror, as sadistic playboy Tom Newelliffe, played with scene-chewing glee by Calvin Lockhart, invites some prospective lycanthropes to his place, hoping to bag the ultimate hunting trophy in the process. As with *Screaming*, *Beast* also benefited from the Amicus moguls' marketing savvy: Fifteen minutes before the end of the film, a clock appears on screen to tick off a

30-second "werewolf break", giving the audience a chance to make their own guess about the culprit. In truth, the solution isn't that hard to sniff out, but there's a lot of interesting scenery along the way, including fancy werewolf tracking gadgets, a dog standing at for the trailer "beast" and another outstanding performance by Cushing as lycanthrope authority (and suspect) Dr. Lundgren.

These particular Amicus outings are not all essentials, and several of the studio's best films have yet to debut on DVD, but they're a good introduction to the company that challenged Hammer. For now, these comic appetizers are guaranteed to keep your upper lip stiff — along with most of the hairs on the back of your neck.

Paul Corio



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"THE BRAIN IS THE COMPLETELY CRACKERS TALE OF THE MANY LIVES AND LOVES OF A GIGANTIC, EVIL, INFLATABLE BRAIN."

THE MAD MUSINGS OF A SCHIZOID CINEPHILE

by Chris Alexander

So, there's this wonderfully trashy Canadian movie called *The Brain* that I really, really, really like that pretty much everyone else really, really, really hates. Shot mostly on location in suburban Mississauga, Ontario in 1987, and released in 1988, *The Brain* is the completely crackers tale of the many lives and loves of a gigantic, evil, inflatable brain that has a face with big scary eyes and a mammoth toothy maw. Said hunka hunka burnin' grey matter controls the minds of its victims and seeks, through a sinister TV broadcast to — what else — take over the world! Of course, a bailey teen resists the Brain's power and plots to take his rubber ass down. Have I sold you yet? No? What's wrong with you? Read on!

There's much to savour in Ed (Bloody Birthday) Hunt's *The Brain* and indeed it pretty much offers every element any serious exploitation movie maven requires: boobs, buckets of fake blood, a low-rent Videodrome-meets-Body Snatchers plot, a deceased B-level cult icon (Rie-Artman's David Gale) and some crushingly awful dialogue. And yet the film has never made it to DVD, and the VHS I managed to snag has been out of print for almost seventeen years.

In one of those perverse little twists of fate, these wonderfully weird-ass strokes of karma, I crossed paths with a gal whose pappy happens to be Kenneth Gord, veteran film and television producer. Ken's credits include Stuart Gordon's *Daughter of Darkness*, the Highlander TV series and, you guessed it, *The Brain*. While as pre-producer on Gordon's upcoming film *Sluck*, I managed to corner Ken (a massive horror and cult film fanatic in his own right) and grill him about his neglected CanCon camp classic.

Are you aware how god-damned cool your film is?

If you mean "so bad it's good" cool, then yeah, I think it's cool. I love cheesy, atrociously awful movies; they're usually more entertaining than today's so-called comedies anyway. And, as a matter of fact, I'd put *The Brain* up there with Don Doherty's *Fiasco*, J.P. Smirn's *Pieces*, that Tiny Tim movie *Blood Harvest* and any other gloriously bad "cool" movies any day of the week. But if you're talking like, straight-up cool, I think you may need a vacation.

Maybe I do. So, what was the actual Brain made out of?

Some kind of evil rubber skit, probably toxic. We shot most of the interiors in the old Canadian General Electric plant at Dupont [Street] and Davenport [Road] in Toronto. They had toxic waste in those buildings, so it didn't really matter what we did. I think there are condoms there now.

Why was the Brain evil?

The Brain wasn't evil. It was just attempting the same thing as *Survivor*, *American Idol* and World Cup soccer. But the difference is that they succeeded.

The Brain From Planet Arous, The Brain That Wouldn't Die, Brain of Blood, The Man With Two Brains — it seems your film is the last word on the subject of bad brains? Why?



The Brain

Our brains are under siege: Computers, nano-held devices, the Internet, iPods, cellphones, games, television, the media, sports, celebrity gossip, on and on. Brains aren't proactive anymore. They're technological garbage cans, media receptacles. We're putting shit into our brains all day long. It's a wonder we can even have an original thought anymore. And ultimately, *The Brain* wasn't my film, it was the great [director] Ed Hunt's.

Hey! Don't shift the Brain, or I mean blame! Sorry.

Tune in next month as I go deeper into the De Wier Code-ish mystery behind *The Brain* with the reclusive Ed Hunt. 'ep, I found him, and Lucy — he's got some 'splainin' to do! Alexander out. ☺



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BY GARY BUTLER

BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

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IN THIS ISSUE!

MAN-BAT THE RETURN

by Bruce Jones and Mike Roddenman DC

DEADMAN #1

by Bruce Jones and John Workles DC/Vertigo

THE EXTERMINATORS: BUG BROTHERS

by Simon Oliver and Tony Moore DC/Narrative

THE NIGHT DRIVER

by John Cook, Christopher Mills and Christopher Latham Dreamcatcher/Moonstone

THE SAVAGE BROTHERS #1 OF 30

by Andrew Cosby, Johannes Steinhilber and Mattel Allentown DC/Mattel Studios

HALLOWEEN: AUTOPHOS

by Stefan Hultine and Marcus Smith Pantheon Pictures

This issue, two reboots that are made for shocking: *Man-Bat: The Return* and *Deadman*, both by legendary horror comic scribe Bruce Jones (*R.A. 151*). Superhero devotees will be familiar with Jones' recent three-year stint on *The Hulk*, which masterfully played up the psychologically murderous implications of the character's killy/Hyde duality. Those with broader interests will of course recognize Jones as the prolific contributor to Warren Publishing's *Creeper* and *Eerie*, two magazines that almost single-handedly preserved the EC spirit in the '70s (Note that Jones and artist Bernie Wrightson's *Jennifer*, a horrific love story about a deformed girl, first published in 1974's *Creeper* #63, served as the basis for the recent *Dario Argento Masters of Horror* TV episode of the same name.)

Jones' *Man-Bat*, a five-issue miniseries that just wrapped, notably follows in The Hulk's homicidal footsteps: Jones allowed the anti-hero, Kirk Langstrom, to develop a full-on man/beast split personality, daring to make him brutally slay his own wife and children.

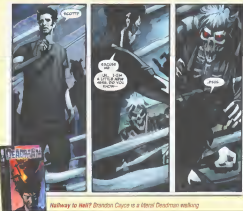
"I wanted *Man-Bat* to be a total out-of-control monster with no redeemable social value," Jones explains.

By contrast, Langstrom, the man, remains very much human and "filled with the attendant guilt that results from the slaying, blaming himself in spades even though he's not directly responsible for the tragedy."

Jones suggests that the majority of superheroes have bifurcated psyches in some way.

"For that matter, so do you and I," he says. "I use that to delve perhaps a bit deeper into their private hells." He argues that what makes each character unique is the individual reaction to the situation at hand. In the case of *Man-Bat*, who is worse than a mere beast, the character develops into an all-out monster.

Conversely, *Deadman* involves less a per-



Waylay to *HIT*? Brandon Cayce is a literal *Deadman* walking

sonality that's been split than a soul that's been lost, though there's no doubt that protagonist Brandon Cayce is tortured in both of those senses. This new ongoing title, in the form of a Vertigo reboot – which means that readers should expect big ideas and polysyllabic words – offers nods to Neal Adams' original comic (from the character created by Arnold Drake and Carmine Infantino) but is otherwise pure Jones. Clearly, the title character's name is both an homage – "Brandon" tips its hat to the 1970s *Deadman*, Boston Brand – and a portent, as "Cayce" cannot help but invoke Edgar Cayce, the 20th-century American celebrity psychic who channeled answers to questions on diverse subjects including, relevantly, reincarnation.

A decidedly post-9/11 story, *Deadman* opens in the cockpit of a plane that's crashing over London. Brandon's mooting a free flight off of his pilot brother, Scott, who has intentionally caused the no-survivors accident. As the book's title suggests, Brandon is

indeed dead but, strangely, is the one victim who remains tangibly attached to the "real" world, albeit unstruck in time (similar to Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* or *Donne Darko*). The turn of almost every page leads to a variant temporal scenario, and the difference between dream/twilight and reality – let alone alternate reality – is ever unclear. Existential horror drives Brandon's every step (seemingly) forward.

Jones admits to having taken weeks to merely research the basic thread driving the story, with his goal being to use the trappings of modern physics, particularly string theory and black holes, as "a backdrop to a fictional nightmare, not a platform to preach advanced science."

"*Deadman* is the hardest title I'm involved with right now to be succinct about," Jones admits. "It's an ongoing adventure in discovery and I hate like hell to give out even the faintest hints. DVDs should not, in my opinion, have chapter stops."

QUICK CUTS

IT TOOK almost two decades, but DC/Vertigo has finally managed to come up with an image that puts the "creaky" back in "creaky" more disturbingly than the previous standard-bearer, *Hellblazer* #1, p 8 (druggie in bathtub, thinks he's covered in bugs and he is). The current reigning champion *The Exterminators: Bug Brothers* #3, p 8 (old lady is nursing home, slaughtering maggots). Wait, maybe it was issue #4, p 20 (infatuated boy in alien apartment faces plants in cockroach carpet). Or issue #2, p 11 (decomposing corpse haemorrhaging bugs). Anyway, no need to debate, because the entire first five issues of this bizarre B-bomber-cum-soup opera about the new kid on the exterminating block have been anthologized in one handy trade paperback. There is a dangerous character in this hilariously black storyline that one would be tempted to describe as the King of the Cockroaches, if that title wasn't already reserved for artist extraordinaire Tony Moore. *The Walking Dead*, *Fear Agent*, now *The Exterminators*. Whatever this guy's drinking, I recommend that DC send him a case of it, an opener and a Thank You card, pronto.

I REALLY LIKE new imprint CinemaGraphix's intention: play up the natural relationship of film and comic books by telling original stories with the latter medium specifically in if they were executed in the

former (kind of like Warren Ellis' idea of "widescreen comics"), minus those pesky

capes and tights). This company's first release, *The Night Driver*, deftly fulfills its visually driven mandate, with big-panelled art and an energetic sense of pacing. The story starts with Hardin Jones, a salesman who sleeps in his car more than in his bed, stepping to help the wrong man on a highway roadside one night. The murderous rampage that follows is basically *The Hitcher* channeling Robert Bloch. It's good, bloody fun, though it tries just a bit too hard to astonish (the major twist is far from surprising). Overall, a decent non-identity crisis, perhaps just a rewrite away from being big-screen ready.

YES, WE ARE all expecting the zombie reckoning to be savage. But savagely furry? And savagely brotherly? Just when I thought I'd seen everything, BOOM! Studios straps my neck yet again with a completely cool alternative to everyday horror tropes. The debut issue of *The Savage Brothers* takes about a half-dozen punches to get to the point: it's *The Dukes of Hazzard*, tough as nails and armed to the teeth, crossed with the zombie apocalypse. Los Bros Fierros offer a unique service in a 26 Days Later kind of world. Dale and Otti will find your missing loved ones and return with them - or with photographic proof that they did the right thing (payment in beer acceptable). Not surprisingly, when the opportunity to do the heroic thing rears its moral head, the boys have to think about it "Virgin, stripper, huh?" observes Dale, as they stumble upon a strange, zombie-run sacrificial altar. "Must be another sign of the apocalypse." Oh, maoose writer Andrew Cosby, you had me with the previous page, when the lady in question commented, "The apocalypse blows."



IT'S A GOOD TIME to be a fan of supernatural serial slayers and comic books. Brian Pulido's *House of Horror* titles - featuring Jason, Leatherface and Freddie - are all above-average productions, certainly better than any of the film sequels. But for the best slask for your cash, Michael Myers remains the king, and he has writer Stefan Hutchinson to thank. Author of the recommended comic *Halloween: One Good Scare* (see RMB37), Hutchinson has now penned *Halloween: Aspects*, a free exclusive with the purchase of *Halloween: 25 Years of Terror*, his straight-to-DVD documentary. Aspects involves a photojournalist who is either a sociopath or a loser (hey, it's a fine line), assigned to follow Myers' trail of blood. Gazing too deep into the abyss, he comes to perceive the maniac as an artist, not a killer, and decides to use this "rough" in his own empty life. Before you decide you've figured out the ending, stop and ask yourself what the title means, then check over your shoulder, because Myers and Hutchinson probably got the jump on you. **A**



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DVD delirium volume 3

Nathaniel Thompson, ed.
FAB Press

Another issue of *Rue Morgue*, another amazing installment in Nathaniel Thompson's essential reference series *DVD Delirium*, and fuckin' A. I say. Published by the equally marvellous FAB Press, Thompson's ongoing collection of critical essays on cult, horror and exploitation films currently available on international DVD is bar none, hands down, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the single finest movie review book on the market. And believe you me, even though there are a bunch of 'ems out there, *DVD Delirium* is light years removed from Leonard Maltin.

Volume 3 is even bigger and badder than *Volume 2*, chronicling a plethora of titles that you alternately adore, revile, and in many cases haven't even heard of. Starting at A and not letting up until the final stroke of Z, Thompson (along with fellow sucker scribbles Tim Groves, Tim Greer, Don Guarisco and Kim Newman) has included some real word ones in this third-go around. Films as diverse as *Gloss* (a little movie I love that Groves reviews favourably), Jess Franco's *Fascinos*, Chan Wook Park's *Oldboy*, Rene Cardona Jr's *Blowups* and even Schindler's *The Tin Drum* are discussed and analyzed with equal, straight-faced



respect. In fact, Groves' defensive review of the 2005 *House of Wax* remake made me rethink my loathing for it. Yes, I actually went back and watched it again and enjoyed it infinitely more than the first time. And really, that's what this book is all about – seeing all counterculture films from every corner of the globe through the same lens.

If you're a fan of the previous installments (*DVD Delirium Volume 1*, *2* and *Volume 1 Redux*) then really, this notice is moot. Like me, you're already written and no doubt swear by Thompson's fine tome. You're certainly not going to agree wholeheartedly with or be swayed by every single review – for instance, I hate and will always hate *The Fifth Element* no matter what anyone, living or dead, says – but every word is well a treat to read. Counting the days 'til *Volume 4*.

Chris Alexander

donald cammell: a life on the wild side Rebecca and Sam Umland FAB Press

Back in *RM* 57, I used my Schizoid Caeophile column to champion a brilliant, semi-obscure thriller called *White of the Eye* by the late visionary artist Donald Cammell. I copied my piece by detailing the filmmaker's slow, realistic suicide

that had been part of his mythos since his death in 1996. Now along comes FAB Press' fantastic new biography *Donald Cammell: A Life on the Wild Side*, which swiftly and mercilessly debunks this and many other urban legends surrounding the dangerously eccentric auteur.

Sam and Rebecca Umland's long overdue examination of the Scottish-born celluloid wild child is essential for anyone who wants to poke around in the back alleys of a tainted genius. A painter and novelist, Cammell made his name with the 1970 mind-bender *Performance*, which he co-directed with equally outlandish cinematographer/filmmaker Nicholas Roeg. He's best known to *Rue Morgue* readers, however, as the force behind the masterful 1977 future shocker *Demon Seed*.

Details of his drug-fuelled, roller coaster life have always been sketchy, but the Umlands delve deep, revealing a frustrated, depressive individual who was at odds with Hollywood and the world around him. Frustrated by the way he was treated by studio execs during his final picture, *Wild Side*, Cammell – who by the mid-'90s was obsessed with suicide and slept with a gun

finally opted to bow out of the mortal coil he adored, feared and deplored. Though his demise isn't nearly as cosmic as was once believed (reports claimed he shot himself at a specific place on his fore-



The Grim Reader

ONE EYE MONSTER

Susan Clark

Necessary Evil Press

This cleverly constructed novella tugs with perception and reality as it explores how a visual experience like a film, through its terrible influence on people, can cause major shifts in history. Clark plays with both concept and reader, shyly sliding through that fourth wall. A good read, but there's enough story here for a full-length novel; it's almost a shame Clark didn't keep writing.



Sandra Kosturi

THOSE ON FLAME

A SPURIOUS

TOUR OF TORONTO

Terry Murray

AcropCollier Canada

Not nearly as grotesque as the subtitle would imply, this heavily illustrated, rapped text takes you through the world of close sculptures on buildings in Toronto. It's still a handy reference should you want to take a walking tour of the city's dark architecture. Here's hoping Murray will give us a real gothic tour (of Canada?) one day.



Michael Mitchell

BRANDED ON A FLAME

Glenn Priest

BL Publishing

When Sean Jones flies to California to testify in a brutal gang slaying, the last thing he's expecting is that the mob will try to dispatch him on route by loading up the plane with deadly snakes. Sure, the novelization (like the movie) is Hollywood predictable, but it's also entertaining pulp. You'll have to wait 'til page 359, though, for 'I've had it with these motherfucking snakes on this motherfucking plane!'



Audra Beters



Donald Cammell: *A Life on the Wild Side*: An image from the director's 1977 feature shocker *Devote Seed*

head to achieve a kind of grim final zen), if anything, the blunt, violent truth is even more unsettling and sad.

Donald Cammell may have only made a handful of pictures, but they were important films deeply etched with his specific obsessions and psychosis. The comprehensive and respectfully penned *A Life on the Wild Side* doesn't sensationalize the darkness in Cammell's soul — his tale is laid enough as is — but celebrates the life of a troubled man who was constantly searching. From his work with outrageous experimentalist Kenneth Anger to his failed collaborations with equally larger-than-life cinema presence Marlon Brando, this book sets the record straight and is also proof positive that some of history's greatest works of art were unleashed by unstable hands.

Chris Alexander

gospel of the living dead: george romero's visions of hell on earth

Kim Paffenroth

Baylor University Press

Anyone who's written a high-school essay knows the drill: state your thesis, provide at least three points of textual evidence and analysis to prove that thesis while ignoring any evidence that contradicts it, then tie up your argument in a neat concluding para-

graph. As in high school, so in university right up to full-length books published by academic presses.

Kim Paffenroth's *Gospel of the Living Dead* exemplifies the strengths and weaknesses of this rhetorical template. A study of Romero's classic zombie quadology, as well as Zack Snyder's 2004 remake of *Dawn of the Dead*, the book puts forth a compelling argument that the films parallel Dante's *Divine Comedy* as an epic journey into the fallen human condition and its scant chance at salvation in a world beset by sin, temptation and demonic entities. The analysis is thorough, smart and comprehensible to the average reader, but only a diehard fan or academic will likely want to wade as deep as the 25-page introduction, which succinctly lays out Paffenroth's main arguments.

Having said that, the subsequent chapters offer their own delights. Paffenroth provides a synopsis, shooting history, and analysis of each of the films, showing their relation to the nine rings of Dante's Hell and to the lesser-known sermon of Purgatory. Many critics have tossed out the subversive elements in Romero's zombie films, arguing that individually and as a series they portray a racist, consumerist America being literally eaten alive by its own irreconcilable appetites, but Paffenroth offers a fitter, more humane, look at the modern zombie

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TALES FROM THE WEIRD WIDE WEB

by MONICA S. EVIER



Supernatural possession, black magic zombies, giant birds that swoop from the sky to abduct young children, then who kill with their skulls, unimaginable evil, and a parallel monochrome reality where the mental trumps physically every time. Welcome to *May Mal*, an innovative free web serial available at maymal.com, collaboratively penned by John Urbick (*Sins of Blood and Stone*) and Stoker Award-winning authors Michael Oliveri and Weston Ochse.

The project, which uses blogging technology, photographs, RSS feeds and audio podcasts to weave its complex tale, takes the serial fiction blogging phenomenon—think David Wellington's *Monster Island* (PMMF)—to the next level. But why would three professionally published genre scribes give away such a large, arcing piece of fiction for free?

"The cheesy answer is because we can," Ochse jokes. "But more than cheesy, the three of us have a significant amount of output, and rather than sell our stories for a pittance, we're using this opportunity to create an entire universe where horror, magic and monsters inhabit our everyday reality. All of us have serious novel projects and deadlines that we're constantly battling, but also have more creativity than we have an outlet for. *May Mal* is this outlet, allowing us to write without deadlines, except those imposed by fans.... In a world of our creation without fear of editors or second guessing."

The trio's tales are set in a world that mirrors our own but is full of malevolent magic and darkness. Some of the stories span a mere four or five chapters, while others take months to unravel as they combine and crossover. Characters, such as El Cazarro, struggle to keep creatures who can possess human bodies from storming the American border, best cops Hack and Jason break up dangerous domestic disturbances between telekinetically endowed combatants, and the Seeker must battle all manner of adventures as he strives to complete a clandestine mission. Since the site's launch on January 1, 2006, the authors have focused on their own individual plot lines and story arcs, but this fall promises to bring about a greater interweaving of characters and their respective tales.

"Honestly, *May Mal* is a canvas with unlimited options," says Ochse of their multi-year endeavor. "One can also think of *May Mal* as a battle of what each of us has to offer, a place where we as writers can play and experiment."

Obviously there are challenges when multiple authors express their creativity within the same world. Thus, when it came to outlining the fictional universe, the effort was a wholly collaborative one.

"I brought John [Urbick] on board first, and we kicked the idea around in person," Oliveri explains of *May Mal*'s inception. "Then after we brought Weston [Ochse] in, we all started brainstorming and carved out a rough idea of our world. We discussed a lot of it in comics terms,

with individual issues forming overall arcs, and all participating in a shared universe."

Despite intentionally keeping the rules regarding *May Mal*'s mythology "loose", the authors quickly realized they had to be careful not to contradict each other or accidentally bring to life a character that had been killed in another contributor's tale. To help combat these potential continuity issues the trio created a Wiki (electronic encyclopedia) on Oliveri's home server to track the new elements each scribe introduces to the world.

But more than just embracing new technologies, the whole of *May Mal* is an exercise in forward thinking. Tagged with a Creative Commons license, it gives fans permission to disseminate the story as they see fit, provided they attach proper credit and don't use it for financial gain.

"We set ourselves a simple goal: exposure," says Oliveri. "We're not doing this for the money or we'd simply write out the stories in long form and start submitting them to publishers. Instead, we just want to get more of our work out there and that's really worked.... It might have been smarter to have more of the stories in the can before we started so we could have kept our posts more regular, but I think working this way allows for a more organic process—the stories unfold for the readers the same way they do for us."

New chapters in the *May Mal* tale are posted regularly to the website, where readers can also access a complete archive of back issues. ■



classic tales of horror: volume 1

Adèle Harbey, ed.
Bloody Books

With no introduction to hint at the selection process behind this new anthology of classic horror stories, the reader is forced to search the tales themselves for common thematic threads, narrative techniques and prose styles. The first thing that becomes obvious are the stories' high literary standards – not surprising with a contributors list that includes such genre heavyweights as Poe, Ambrose Bierce and Mary Shelley, as well as other authors not primarily associated with horror fiction, such as Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens and Honoré de Balzac.

The first hint of a unifying theme becomes clear by about the fourth story. Guy de Maupassant's classic tale of creeping dread, *The Horla*. De Maupassant's narrative, driven half-mad by an invisible entity whose sinister 'purpose' is never fully revealed, articulates the primordial fear that unites the collection: "One would think that the air, the transparent air, was full of unknowable powers, whose mysterious presence attracted us."

This pervading haze/suspicion of the existence of unknowable powers – and their often fatal effect upon the troubled and impressionable human psyche – sets this collection above and apart from similar anthologies.

There are no vampires, zombies or Rurikis listed here, only the stick-on minds of average Joe who find that their bodies desire and indubitable impulses leave them a hole between our world and a spiritual plane of winged phantoms and irrational suspicion who creep in the windows at night to observe their sleep. Or so it seems. Many of the stories can actually be interpreted as chronicles of mental illness, with the supernatural elements functioning as projections of the tormented mind. Did the murderer in Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* really hear the heartbeat of his victim thundering from beneath the floorboards? Or was the body just buried?

Poe knows the final reckoning to the reader's shivering imagination.

What editor Adèle Harbey has done here is exactly what readers demand of any good anthologist; she's chosen some of the most intriguing works published in the last two centuries, including a few found in places where most wouldn't have bothered to look, making this a very worthwhile collection indeed.

James Grafton

She is especially adept at showing how often Romero blurs the line between living and dead, human and zombie, reminding us that the only thing separating us from our shuffling brethren is a few degrees of skin temperature and our target scores at the shooting range.

James Grafton

Destinations Unknown

Gary A. Braunbeck
Cemetery Dance Publications

Known throughout the genre as one of the best and most consistent short story writers out there, Gary Braunbeck rarely disappoints. His car-themed collection of one novella and two short stories is no exception – for the most part.

The novella *Road Maps and Daddy*, *Blitz* takes up most of the 216-page book, telling the tale of a man who, through his job as a coroner's assistant, stumbles upon an alternate plane of existence where people killed in car crashes worship the Road as a god – one that requires sacrifices, no less. While it's a pretty solid and engaging story, it could have been trimmed back some. The too frequent and intensely detailed descriptions of cars distract from the characters and overall plot, much like the story's tendency toward long parenthetical asides.

Congestion is a far higher tale. Told in the second-person, it features an over-stressed man who's stuck in traffic and experiencing some very troubling events, not the least of which is a stuttering heart-beat. Only a handful of people can pull off second-person POV and Braunbeck's deft touch is on full display here.

The final story, *Merge Right*, is easily the strongest in the book. A *Twilight Zone* quality seeps from every page, inviting the reader to continue in hopes of unravelling what's really going on. In it, protagonist Matt Leigh finds himself widowed and grief-stricken after his wife kills herself following the loss of their child. Her suicide note holds one last request: for him to drive her ashes to Niagara Falls, where the couple had honeymooned. However, after a series of "merge right" signs take him off course, he discovers that his wife wants more from him than merely scattering her ashes. It's a finely crafted story of suspense and quiet horror that closes the book on a strong note.

If you're familiar with Braunbeck's work, you'll certainly want to add *Destinations Unknown* to your library. Newcomers, however, will find his multi-award-nominated short story collection *Things Left Behind* a much better launching point.

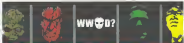
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WARNING. TRAVELOGUE OF TERROR

THE GRANDE MASQUERADE
MONTREAL, QUEBEC

by Chris Boswell

It's not hard to imagine why someone would choose this twisting maze of dimly lit cobblestone streets that makes up the Old Montreal waterfront as the backdrop for one of North America's largest Halloween festivals. By day, the roads of this former trading post are swimming with tourists marveling at architectural landmarks such as the Notre-Dame Basilica and the St-Sulpice Seminary while perusing the area's countless art galleries and boutiques. But when night falls, an ominous air settles in. With only a small population living up the recently reclaimed warehouse loft and low local bars and restaurants to entice visitors to stay into the evening hours, the streets become eerily silent, leaving only the echo of your footsteps to creak on the stone buildings and down endless forbidding alleyways cast in a ghostly lantern glow.

It's the perfect setting for The Grand Masquerade, a four-night outdoor Halloween festival put on by perennial Quebec event organizers Groupe-Genesi L'Entracte and L'Equipe Spectra. According to the festival's CEO and artistic director Andre L'Heureux, the idea came to him when he and a group of friends visited the Greenwich Village Halloween parade in New York in 1990 and figured something similar would be a hit in Montreal, the City of Festivals. L'Heureux hoped to create a large-scale, outdoor "artistic and cultural festi-

pering" that would employ Quebec's unique cultural flair for theatrical entertainment — a Mardi Gras for the horror set.

At first, the city was wary of hosting something decidedly dark and not family-friendly in a public space. But the first Grande Masquerade, held in 2004, was a surprising success, drawing over 75,000 locals and tourists to Old Montreal's Place Jacques-Cartier with street performances, attractions and games, costume balls and the flagship Funeral Procession down the waterfront's Rue de la Comedie.

Bolstered by its inaugural success, the party grew in both size and scope last October. With an outdoor site that covered three blocks and employed over 300 performers, artists and actors, plus a technical staff of 200, the second Grande Masquerade was a visually awesome experience enjoyed by 100,000 visitors over the Halloween weekend.

Before the festival grounds open at 6 PM, my travel companion and I head to Montreal's famous Joseph Pootan Costumes to cobble something together for the night of partying ahead. A city landmark that has graced the corner of Rue Notre-Dame and Rue Saint-Francois-Xavier since 1865, the store houses more than 6000 articles of clothing over three levels of floor space, making it the premiere destination for outfitting Masquerade attendees.

Accoutred as the undead, we set out for the festival grounds just after dusk. Spread out over three slim blocks running from Rue Notre-Dame down to the waterfront, the site is a spectacle of street performers, fortune tellers and various wandering ghosts, ghouls and other assorted bloodsoaked monstrosities stalking through the swimming crowd.

As anyone who has been to a Cirque du Soleil performance knows, when it comes to overblown theatrics and unbridled spectacle, no one does it quite like the French. The buildings of Old Montreal are lit up in ghostly shades of red, green and orange, while on the rooftops actors dressed as gargoyles

beat their leathery wings and shriek at the milling crowd below.

Gothic industrial music pounds throughout the site, provided by a DJ dressed like the Ghouls Reeper. He's perched in a sound booth overlooking a stage lined with impaled skulls where robotic Druids perform dark rituals. Elsewhere, the crowd gasps as an executioner straps a victim from the crowd into his electric chair and sends sparks flying high into the air. Trundling zombies and red-spattered psychopaths keep the costumed masses on their toes, jumping out of dark corners and delivering some serious scares.

After checking out some of the performances, there is plenty to do for those willing to spend a little money. A small midway features a variety of Halloween-themed games, such as a human dartboard, or you can join the giant lineup for a trip through La Cour. For \$2, visitors are chased like pigs in a slaughterhouse through a cage maze by lurking butchers clanging their knives against the bars, the route winding past rooms containing some surprisingly disturbing visuals (including a wild-eyed man cowering apart his own wrist) while unseen hands grab and prod from every direction in the dark.

Once the action at the outdoor site winds down at 11 PM, the throngs make their way to the evening's costume ball, held in the Marché Bonsecours, which has served as a market and the area's cultural epicentre since its construction in 1847. The Grande Masquerade hosts two costume balls over the weekend, catering to gothic horror culture on Friday and the sci-fantasy crowd on Saturday.

Here again all the stops are pulled out to ensure a theatrical experience. Hundreds of costumed patrons pack the dance floor as performance artists — among them a group of five women clad only in blue body paint and gas masks and a man airbrushed head to toe to look like a lizard — roam through the crowd drawing screams and applause. At the stroke of midnight, the evening culminates in a gloriously bloody "live human sacrifice" stage show. The crowd cheers as a victim

is dragged onto the stage and bound head and foot to a wooden frame, so a vampy drag queen can rip out his heart and spray the audience with fake blood.

Upstairs on a half-level overlooking the dance floor, visitors view some of the artwork on display, including horror-themed paintings by local artists Carabacu and Steve Bolduc, a collection of prosthetic film effects by Quebec firm Ulemaker, and the gallery's centerpiece, a winged embryonic demon sculpture titled *L'Ange Gardien* (Guardian Angel), courtesy of H.R. Tiger.

Apart from the costume balls, the centerpiece of The Grande Mascarade experience is Saturday night's Funnest Procession. Featuring more than 100 decked-out performers and dozens of costumed visitors (who, in the off-putting words "of the brochure, were invited to 'gather in a giant coagulation' in a main square of the festival grounds), the parade winds its way down the waterfront street Rue de la Commune and past more than 30,000 cheering onlookers. Brass marching bands blare reggae music in true Mardi Gras fashion as a group of widows alternates between robbing and raving dancing, followed by gravediggers, voodoo shamans on stilts and jagged-tooth demons hauling a trundle cart carrying an unwilling bride to the parade's endpoint, in front of the Marché Bonsecours, for an unholy wedding under a sky full of fireworks fired over the ancient rooftops.

Ultimately, The Grande Mascarade is a well-orchestrated festival that delivers a memorable cultural and artistic experience that surpasses expectations. Organizers do a remarkable job of



Street Scenes: A sampling of the wide array of weekend-long Gracie Mascarade in Montreal.

keeping with a darker, more adult tone despite the festival's openness to the public, and what the event may lack in genuine scares it more than makes up for with pure theatrical spectacle in a perfect Halloween setting.

While the specifics of this year's party, running October

27 to 29, were still being finalized as of press time, L'Heureux notes that the format will be changing somewhat for the festival's third instalment, becoming even more performance-oriented, featuring more artists, street theatre and live gothic music.

For more details on The Grande Mascarade, tickets and photos from last year's event, visit grandemascarade.com/accueil_en.aspx.



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DINNER'S READY! THE GORE-MET

This issue, the Gore-met takes two independent gore films to the cleaners and only one comes out relatively stain-free.

The popularity of the horror film at the local multiplex ebbs and wanes with the whims of a fickle public, and independent horror films are the true backbone of the business. Last ye forget, indispensable modern classics *Night of the Living Dead*, *The Texas Chain-saw Massacre*, *Black Christmas* and *Halloween* were independent movies. Unfortunately, that era of quality independent filmmaking died when the first consumer Betamax hit the market. With the advent of affordable digital video and media replication technology, as well as the publicity potential of the Internet, the world has been dropped in the lap of anyone aspiring to the mantle of auteur. And they are legion. While results may vary, their enthusiasm does not, and regardless of the final product, the independent horror filmmaker is a commodity to be nurtured.

Of all the camerader Coppolias Ron Atkins stands out. The DIY methodology and demented absurdity of his early shot-on-video experiments — *Schizophrenic*, *The Abhor*, *Mangler* (1997), *Necromantic* (1999) and *Exit the Rich* (*The Caretaker's Murders*) (2000) — set them apart from the rabble of just for their sheer unpredictability and complete disregard for taste. Atkins

not only writes and directs his films, he also scores and provides the effects for them, often with collaborators — an egotistical stumbling block for many with similar aspirations.

From the title to the key art to the plot, *Eyes of the Chameleon* is Atkins' glossy, low-budget homage to the Italian giallo genre. Co-writer Ann Teal stars as a disaffected Vegas bartender who descends into a spiral of cheap drugs and sex after a black-gloved killer starts offing the people around her, and a horrible truth about her origin is revealed. Like the best giallo, the script is multi-layered and initially inscrutable, and contains shocking violence, gratuitous lesbianism and odd inspired moments of Atkins' broad of cinematic weakness (such as the sickly sound effects heard when Teal's character gets a *laba piangenti*). Atkins' simple zeal for his chosen craft overcomes any cabling, location or technical deficiencies.

On the other hand, there's *Live Feed*, the debut feature from Vancouver-based Plotzger Films and the latest contender in the extreme sex 'n' splat subgenre, as exemplified by films like *Scrapbook* (2000), the *August Underground* movies and *Murder-Sex-Pieces* (2004). Plotzger Films, a name whose irony will be lost on most, is a production company headed up by the father/son duo of Roy and Ryan Nicholson. Their lengthy list of credits includes makeup effects on such high-profile genre offerings as *Final Destination* and *Blade Trinity*. You would think they would know better.

Let's give credit where it is due. On a technical level, this is an impressive low-budget production — the locations and set design are superb; the cinematography is interesting to the point of stylish, the score is solid, and, most importantly, the film is well edited, clocking in at a refreshingly lean 75 minutes. The performances are as credible as a script composed of screamed

obscenities will allow. Other than that, it's just another overblown, empty-headed, masturbatory Texas Chainsaw Massacre rip-off gore job. A one-pag summerfest, a behemoth clad in a black leather butcher's apron and goggles-eyed bondage mask stabs a sword into a character's hog-tied breast, causing a frenzied geyser of red. Peter Jackson would blush.

Live Feed is not bad film per se, but is indicative of a malignant tumour threatening to strangle the vitality of the host. The horror film is currently enjoying a level of public interest not seen since the early '80s. *Saw 2* and *Hosts* had box office returns of at least 400 percent of their production costs on their respective

opening weekends alone, foreign markets, cable and home video sales were monetary gravy. That kind of enormous and instantaneous profit margin means that greedy investors are throwing cash at low-budget horror films in the slim hopes of scoring those sorts of shekels. As a result, the genre is being suffocated by an epidemic of well-financed fan boys — thank Rob Zombie, Eli Roth, Nick Palumbo or Ryan Nicholson — tossing out glibly, contrived, ego-driven torture shows that are nothing but insipid and embarrassing cinematic jerk eggs. What a waste. ☹



Live Feed

It's a sad day when even I demand a story to justify a bloodbath...



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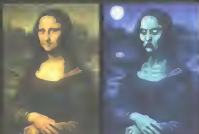
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AUDIO DROME

REVIEWS BY BRETT SAKKER, KEITH CARMAN, TOM DRAGOMIR, MARK R. HASAN AND AARON VON LUFTON



ONETHIRTSIX

The Sister

Tasmanian Music

Have no fear, gentle reader, this is not a review for yet another adolescent Myths clone band. The only thing this one-man UK project has in common with the legendary New Jersey ghost punks is a love for horror, which musician Qian 13B explores through dark, haunting ambience, using keyboard, acoustic guitar, piano and more. At times *The Sister* becomes too experimental for its own good (particularly the harsh guitar and grating vocals of opener "The Squalid Boy"), but on the whole this EP encapsulates a quiet, funeral-like vibe that would sound perfect in almost any horror film. Ideal listening for those long, depressing autumn nights. **AVL 8.5/12**



PHANTOM ROCKERS

On the Loose

Shit Songs Records

One-time Krewmen bassist Mark Burke's band the Phantom Rockers have been around since the late-'80s, putting out heavy, horror-driven psychobilly records, and this one's no exception. Songs about insanity, boogymen and Hannibal Lecter grace this disc —

all pummed home with Burke's familiar extra-heavy bass sounds. Gunfight On El Paso, the song of a murdered lover, features the sun-bleached sounds of a Texan horn section, which helps to add some variety to the album. And if you thought "I'll be dead or alive" had nothing in common with psychobilly, well now they do, as the Phantom Rockers present a weird but well-done cover of their 1985 hit "You Spin Me 'Round" (for some unknown reason). A respectable record from these veterans of the genre. **BD 8.5/12**



HEZOREX

Beyond the Grave

Flavorworks Records

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, Hezorex has just given Tiger Army the aural equivalent of a hand job on *Beyond the Grave*. Obvious inspiration abounds on this release, a definitive document of by-the-book psychobilly, from the haunting bump of *Die De Los Muertos* to the slimy swagger of *Savvy*. Then there's the subject matter: Songs about hot zombie chicks, hot chicks killing people and hot devil women from outer space — ah, you get the idea. A touch more bravado in the delivery could make this Misfits-ish imposter as opposed to Nekromantik-y kitsch, but surprisingly the end result isn't as displeasing as one may expect. Upbeat, sincere and clearly devoted to the scene, Hezorex creates an eerily enticing vibe despite a lack of originality. **KC 8.5/8**



THE SPOOK

Boneman

Drunk 'n' Roll

Reconno Records

With band members named Ross Feraru and Karl Off, and a lead singer dressed like Freddy Krueger, you know *The Spook* isn't going to be the most original band in the horror punk crypt. That said, Boneman still stands up as a decent enough slice of hard-driving punk rock — grrr, mean and sounding like *The Manimals* on alcohol and speed. The flipside of this sick black vinyl single is *Of Gods And Monsters*, a throwaway melodic punk anthem that sounds too much like the newer Misfits for its own good. Not terrible but

not great either. We'll need to hear more than this slim two-song 7-inch before passing serious judgment on *The Spook*. **AVL 8.5/12**



THE BARBARELLATONES

Invasion of the

Surf Zombies

Six Wits Lunch Music

A Pollock painting of transvestite troglodytes, Devil-dogs, murderous marionettes and the surging undead, *Invasion of the Surf Zombies* is spattered with strange sound bites, jangly to crunchy guitars and a requisite track titled *Invasion Of The Surf Zombies*. That creepy cut boasts a lumbering blues riff that wraps around the band's occasionally awkward,



THE OTHER

We Are Who We Eat

Flavorworks Records

Like it or not, *The Misfits* single-handedly defined punk rock horror back in the late-'70s, leaving an entry of imitators, including *The Ghoulies*, who eventually became *The Other* and started recording their own songs. Now, *Flavorworks*'s finest take up the flag and raise it higher than any other devil-rock lovers. Featuring gory *Lord of the Dead*-inspired art, *We Are Who We Eat* still cooks from the Misfits latches but resonates itself with smooth-as-silk vocals and crystalline production. The result is a multi-headed monster (probably, because, literally that can rock you to death [horror Night] or sing you into sweet never-ending sleep [Orb To Darkness]). Singer Red Uhler lets it go with the passion of a man whose very soul is violently, gorgeously attempting to escape through his windpipe. This, my friends, is the past, present and future of horror punk. **TD 8.5/8 1/2**

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MORRICONE'S SCARE SCORES

For Ennio Morricone, 1971 was the year of *Fear*. At least half his now Italian soundtrack label Dugored (dugoredfilms.com) titled the annum in which the composer scored 25 feature films (did he sleep at all?), including three rare European genre soundtracks have been repackaged in a new boxed set.

The best known score here is the quantic music for *Darko Argenia's* *The Cat o' Nine Tails*. The title theme — a folk-styled lullaby with woodwinds, acoustic guitar, wordless chorus plus female vocal — gives us a soothing melody for the friendship between a blind ex-reporter and a spunky title girl. It also acts as an sugar to the album's blame suspense cues: scratchy guitar strings, off-kilter piano and an ethereal, breathy voice kept in line by a five-note baseline that Morricone repeats in much of the remaining music.

Just as catchy is Morricone's score for Lucio Fulci's *Libard* in a *Woman's Skin*. In it, a female vocal dominates a very, up-tempo main theme and a haunting echo effect reworked in subsequent cues. *Entomophobias* will require from Morricone's periodic use of shrill electronics and sustained strings that perfectly evoke a swarm of killer bees. *Gloria Di Notte* is in a funky prog-rock style, with organ shaking out too dissimilar from legendary Italian composer Piero Piccioni's own wickedly groovy writing.

Further electronic effects and improvisational jazz enhance Morricone's compositions for Enzo G. Castellari's *Cold Eyes of Fear*. Bonus cuts have been added to all of the CDs, but almost half of the *Eyes* album is unreleased alternate, which collectively reflect the amazing music performed by Gruppo Di Improvizzazione Nuova Contemporanea. Heavily atmospheric in its throbbing and often explosive intensity, *Eyes* feels like the blended stylistic quills of Walt Dickerson and Charles Mingus: dominant bass, muted trumpet, and waves of improv that still manage to form unified musical textures. That said, how it's supposed to reflect the tension in Castellari's title hostage chiller is hard to imagine if you haven't seen the film.

Avoid the ongoing cottage industry of Morricone releases and endless compilations, the *Fear* set is a welcome value for collectors and fans of vintage, trippy experimentalism.

Mark H. Hansen

tongue-through-cheek lyrics ("They crawl their way out of sandy graves on stormy nights when there are gnarly-ass waves") Also worth a listen: a sawtoothed jam about Jews and the oddly arousing *I Had Sex With A CHUD*. While putting a graveyard next to the beach isn't the best idea by any city planner's standards, it's pretty much the impetus of gothicabilly, and the *Barbarian* takes much with black waves as well as any **TO B&B 1/2**



VENA AMORI The Seduction of an American Housewife

The Doom Scene Reactions Center On The Seduction of an American Housewife, Vena Amori attempts a darker shade of screams, with a serial killer theme and a sound similar to *Abey* and *Reach the Sky*. The album's artwork and the band's website, veneamori.net, show an obvious horror influence (they have a band sticker that uses the Nekromantik artwork and a very cool "Backwoods Terror" poster) but their trendy sound reminds us of way too many bad songs about teen angst and high-school romance issues. With the exception of the occasionally intriguing melodic guitar riff, reminiscent of Seventh Son-era Iron Maiden, *The Seduction of an American Housewife* is an uninteresting mix of melodic hardcore and generic vocals, making Vena Amori come off as a more aggressive My Chemical Romance at best **AVL 2.5**



TERRORIZER Darker Days Ahead Coyote Music

How is it that we death metal dorks are so testidious? Everything has to be just so specific to us. That's why a band like Terrorizer fucking rules. *Darker Days Ahead* kicks ass thanks to the unmistakable pig squeals and other various guitar pyrotechnics of former Napalm Death are man Jesse Peredo. The only thing missing is Barney Greenway's own macabre guttural howling. oh, wait, that's taken care by Anthony Redshaw, a formidable grunter himself. Opting for a typical vibe, undead-inspired tracks such as *Crematorium*, *Fallout* and *Desired Forever* are offset by loving epics of man's inhumanity towards man on ditties such as *Legacy Of Brutality*. All in all, not the most unique or graphic effort, but thanks to a general ravenousness and deep bottom end, one should welcome *Darker Days Ahead* **KC 2.5/2.5**



AUDIO DROME

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Turn on to **Daemonia**, Claudio Simonetti's testosterone-fuelled, industrial strength re-imagining of Goblin.



by Chris Alexander

Imagine *Deep Red* without the bass-heavy jazz fusion pulse, *Suspense* sans the sly, whispering and tinkling music box overture, *Demons* without the frenetic goth-pop theme... you can't. It's obvious to even casual fans of master Italian horror filmmaker Dario Argento how vital music is to his work. They're co-dependent, serving to accentuate his prowling camera-work, schizoid colours and graphic, stylized murder set pieces. A large portion of this aural credit falls squarely on the shoulders of progressive rock group Goblin and its founding member Claudio Simonetti, arguably the single most important electronic music composer in the long, bloody history of Italian horror.

Simonetti, who has been the chief sonic right hand to Argento's over-red universe through thick and thin, officially left Goblin in the late '80s.

"After many years we had arrived at a dead point," explains the composer about his decision to part with the band. "We didn't have many things to say anymore and our different personalities made us constantly disagree and we had to split. It was like the divorce of a long-married couple."

Though he briefly reunited with his Goblin cohorts in 2001 to help score Argento's retro giallo *No Hono Sono* (*Sleepless*), the musical innovator was already starting to develop ideas for a new project. Joining forces with a crew of younger, edgier musicians, Simonetti formed

Daemonia, a testosterone-fuelled, industrial strength, heavy metal re-imagining of Goblin's peevish rock opera aesthetic. Taking tracks culled from Goblin's cinematic back catalogue and adding cues and themes by Ennio Morricone and Keith Emerson, the group released their first album, 1998's *Dario Argento Tribute*, the success of which led to a sizeable multi-stop world tour.

One of the two US stops on that tour is documented in the handsomely packaged *Dario Argento Tribute - Live in Los Angeles*, a new two-disc set featuring a DVD of the complete concert recorded at the Proquest Festival. It was shot by FX master Sergio Stiveri and edited

by Simonetti himself, and features the rereleased Daemonia version of Goblin's online *Zombi* (*Dawn of the Dead*) score as the accompanying CD.

"This concert shows us at the beginning, when all the Goblin fans were waiting for our reunion, and certainly they were all very surprised to see me with a new band but playing the same Simonetti/Goblin music with a different sound," says Simonetti.

The DVD concert footage shows Simonetti, Daemonia man Bruno Previtali, bassist Federico Amoroso and drummer Tito Turi at the peak of their bloody, surely assuasive powers. Wandering into frame during a Gothic backlit,

fog-filled intro, the band immediately slams into L'Alba Del Morb Vivente, the devastating main theme from *Zombi*, goosed here with a pun-mauling Sabbathian power-chord metal crunch. From there we get modern, distanced interpretations of *Demons*, Emerson's *Major Tenenbrunus* (from *Identi*), *Supria*, *Phenomena* and *Profondo Rosso* (*Deep Red*), among others, and are treated to industrial rock overhauls of John Carpenter's *Halloween Theme* and Mike Oldfield's head-spinning antichrist classic *Tubular Bells*.

While Goblin's original 1978 *Zombi* score set the bar for sonic zombie funk mayhem and provided the perfect backdrop for George A. Romero's epic undead masterpiece, Daemonia's version is a different ghoul entirely, as every track isamped up and muscled for maximum flesh-chomping, inward-sucking effect. Despite the success of the project, Simonetti doesn't have plans to record more soundtrack music with the group.

"I don't think Daemonia will be a 'score composing' band like Goblin," he admits. "I feel more free to compose and arrange the soundtracks in my way, that's why I prefer to work on my own but, who knows, maybe some day..."

The oversized *Live in Los Angeles* double-disc dig pack, along with other Daemonia releases and merchandise, is available online from daemonia.it.



PLAY DEAD



GRAPHICS



PLAYABILITY



SHIVERS

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GAMES REVIEWED BY ANDREW LEE



JAWS UNLEASHED

PC, PS2, Xbox
Majesco Entertainment

For those of us old enough to remember, there was a time in the '70s when few things seemed scarier than going for a swim, and it was all because of a little flick called *Jaws*. Thirty years later it's finally possible to travel back to Amity Island to kick some ass, but instead of hitting the water to hunt the great white, in *Jaws Unleashed* you are the shark.

As a massive, cold-blooded aquatic vertebrate, missions involve utilizing your tail to smash boats to splinters, your body to push barrels of explosives around to blow up houses and your razor-sharp teeth to turn scuba divers into shredded snacks. The vibrant, crisp graphics provide resplendent gore as you chomp everything from sea turtles to submarines, and you even get to fight menacing killer whales and giant squids.

Unfortunately, the game can only be played in single-person mode and follows a pretty linear story with a handful of side challenges to obtain upgrades. Where *Jaws Unleashed* really suffers, however, is with its confusing controls and a camera system which freezes for too often. And though it utilizes what is probably the best-known soundtrack in movie history, the music is repetitive and gets boring fast, making it about as scary as a Flot-O-Fish.



RESIDENT EVIL: DEADLY SILENCE

Wiiware DS
Capcom

With the growing popularity of hand-held games, it's about time Capcom released a new *Resident Evil* for the platform. That said, it's surprising that they embraced the original PSOne title and tossed in a few upgrades rather than develop something new. But it works.

Although it's basically the same game you've played a million times before, returning to the mansion with the S.T.A.R.S. team is a neat experience and being able to do it in hand-held format is a definite plus. The multi-player capability means up to four players can take on the zombies and hellhounds collectively. The game also has a new "robust" mode, allowing for more, very intense, smoother combat. Other upgrades include faster loading and reloading times, a "quick-turn" button and a touch screen system which makes a whole new playing dynamic.

Though *Deadly Silence* still has the chunky graphics from the original, it manages to retain the series' spooky atmosphere. Next stop: Raccoon City.



NIGHT WATCH

PC
Golem Software Entertainment

Based on the Russian novel and recent horror movie of the same name, this turn-based strategy game continues the story of the Night Watch, a group of beings known as the Light Others who guard the Dark Others and ensure a peace treaty using mankind from destruction is respected.

Players assume the role of Stan, a Light Other recruited into the forces of the Night Watch to battle vampires, werewolves, werewolves and other supernatural creatures. Along the way, you recruit warriors, shape warriors and druids to utilize their unique powers for the battle—most of which takes place in a parallel reality called The Gloom.

Though it looked promising, *Night Watch* is plagued by a chunky, dated-looking engine and poorly rendered characters. Battle, though exciting at first, quickly becomes dull and repetitive, like the horribly interspersed cut-scenes and movie clips. Quick, what's Russian for "sucks donkey dick"? ...

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Classic Cut

Presents

TARGETS



USA - 1968
Directed by Peter Bogdanovich
Paramount

In modern it's a word seldom associated with horror prior to 1996's *Scream*, but it's become a near-reflexive cliché in the years since. *Targets*, however, predates *Scream* (not to mention Wes Craven's *New Nightmare* and *Begus Lane's* self-reflexive cult love *Angus*) by decades. That said, the faded fourth wall doesn't quite get torn down here — it's just very, very thin.

Targets begins with two apparently unconnected storylines. In the first, Boris Karloff essentially plays himself as Byron Orlok, an aging horror film icon who's anxious to retire on the grounds that real life has become infinitely scarier than any of his films. Writer/director Peter Bogdanovich, also playing a thinly disguised caricature of himself, is a young filmmaker desperately trying to cajole Orlok into one last kerfuffle. Elsewhere in Los Angeles, in a Lynchian underworld that eerily anticipates *Blue Velvet*, a wholesome young man (Tim O'Kelly) amasses an arsenal of weaponry for a killing spree. The two plot threads intersect seamlessly in the final reel, as these characters square-off at a drive-in horror show. And as clever as the postmodern conceit may be, all would be for naught had Bogdanovich not delivered such a suspenseful and genuinely shocking climax.

The roll call of A-list directors who get their feet wet working for B-movie super-producer Roger Corman (1966/53) is staggering. Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Jonathan Demme and James Cameron collectively qualify as the tip of the iceberg. But *Targets*, which launched Bogdanovich's career, is a far cry from the car chases, sex comedies and schlocky horror Corman was cranking out for the drive-ins and grindhouses in the '60s and '70s, and the story behind it is just as odd.

After directing stage plays in New York and writing for *Esquire*, Bogdanovich moved to Los Angeles in 1964 to try to break into film. A chance meeting resulted in a job as assistant director on Corman's 1966 biker flick *The Wild Angels*. Duty impressed, Corman offered him a chance to write and direct a thriller of his own, with one catch: Karloff, still working despite failing health, owed Corman two days work. Bogdanovich would shoot with Karloff over two days,

then assemble some unknown actors and shoot the rest of the film. The director and his wife, production designer/screenwriter Polly Platt, would have to tailor a script to accommodate the situation. The idea of Karloff playing himself began as a joke. Bogdanovich made to Platt while trying to come up with a credible plot, and the second storyline was inspired by mass-murderer Charles Whitman, who had recently embarked on a shooting spree at the University of Texas in Austin. The script was also overhauled by legendary director Sam Fuller (*Shock Corridor*), who generously refused to take any official credit.

Released just after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., *Targets* didn't do much business but it did win sufficient critical acclaim to turn Bogdanovich into a hot property. Three years later, his masterpiece *The Last Picture Show* would rocket him to the top of the directorial heap, and *Paper Moon* would win further accolades, but hubris soon took its toll. His highly publicized romances with *Last Picture Show* star Cybil Shepherd and doomed *Playboy* Playmate Dorothy Stratten (murdered by her crazed ex-boyfriend) soon began to eclipse his films, and his career went into steep decline. His fall from grace paralleled the downward trajectories of Brian De Palma, Robert Altman, William Friedkin and Francis Ford Coppola throughout the late '70s and early '80s, and although some careers would recover in varying degrees, the era of the big-name Hollywood auteur was at an end. Bogdanovich's highest profile gig of late has been as an actor, playing Lorraine Bracco's psychiatrist on *The Sopranos*.

Still, in the featurette on Paramount's 2004 DVD release of *Targets*, he remains unabashedly proud of the film and the impact it had on his career: "[*The Last Picture Show*] wouldn't have happened without *Targets*, which wouldn't have happened without *Roger*, which wouldn't have happened without Karloff." And while Karloff would star in several dismal Mexican horror films before his death, *Targets* — of which he was justifiably proud — is still widely regarded as his last "official" film. Way ahead of its time, it was the first movie to seriously question the role of art horror in the wake of real-world horror.

John W. Bowen



Targets: Boris Karloff in a self-reflexive role as horror icon Byron Orlok.

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